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BUILDING IN SILENCE,

AND

OTHER SERMONS.

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BY

JOHN ALEXANDER JACOB, M.A.,

MINISTER OF ST. THOMAS'S, PADDINGTON.

"Man is not at all settled, or confirmed in his religion, until his religion is the self-same thing with the reason of his mind; so that when he speaks reason, he speaks religion, or, when he speaks religiously, he speaks reasonably; and his religion and reason are mingled together; they pass into one principle; they are no more two but one."—WHICHCOTE.

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TO THE CONGREGATION OF

ST. THOMAS'S, PADDINGTON,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF EVER-READY HELP AND UNFAILING KINDNESS,

DURING TWELVE YEARS

OF PASTORAL MINISTRATION.

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SERMONS.

I.

BUILDING IN SILENCE.

1 KINGS vi. 7.

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building."

INCIDENTAL as the mention of this curious fact may be, we cannot well doubt that it was intended to have a spiritual significance. God's house was built in silence. Those who watched it, as it rose in its beauty and majesty, must have felt a sense of awe stealing upon them as the great work proceeded without the din and clatter with which earthly buildings are raised.

"No hammer fell; no ponderous axes rung;
Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung:
Majestic silence!"

These are the well-known words in which Bishop Heber alludes, in his "Palestine," to this interesting circumstance. Some may remember how Sir Walter Scott pointed out to him that he had made no reference to it, and how, after a few moments' retirement, he came forth with these expressive words. It *was* a majestic silence; and I do not think we shall give a fantastic turn to the passage if we apply it to the building of God's spiritual temple, and say something of the relation of silence to our moral and spiritual life.

Much might be spoken in a general way of the eloquence of silence. If you have ever been alone on a mountain-top, lifted above the sounds of earth, you must have had a very solemnizing sense of being brought nearer to God and to the awful world unseen. The voice of God came to Elijah, not indeed through absolute silence, but as "a still, small, voice;" not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. Certain it is that our deepest feelings do not manifest themselves through speech. Those who are leaving their native land for ever, and watch it as it recedes from their view, sit in silence, not merely because they do not care to speak, but because the thoughts of their hearts cannot be put into language. Men under the influence

of deep feeling simply cannot *talk*. Shallow rivers are commonly noisy rivers, and, as has been well said, "the drum is loud because it is hollow." The profoundest gratitude, the deepest love, the intensest anxiety, are mute. The inability to express them is itself expressive.

But to speak more directly of the relation of silence to our spiritual life, observe (1) that silence seems fittest when we first think of God. Surely the earliest consciousness of His presence and His nearness, if it be a real and a vivid consciousness, commands our silence! To be in the presence of infinite Holiness and Love, to be aware that we are under the eye of Him before whom angels veil their faces, to feel that the high and lofty One who dwells in eternity is in the most intimate nearness to our very heart of hearts, closer to us than the very nearest and dearest of those with whom we commune in the body,—the sense of this surely leaves us absolutely mute!

I say that it is not simply God's absolute vastness but His *nearness* which is so silencing a thought. There is doubtless a Pantheistic view of God which so diffuses Him through nature, or rather identifies Him with it, that the only mental condition possible is a mere blank staring into nature, which has little in

common with real reverence. It was not that which the Psalmist meant when he said, "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. . . . Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" It is not the thought of God's vastness which is awful, so much as the thought that the Infinite One is near to every one of us, so that "in Him we live and move and have our being." If there be something awful in an unknown God, surely there is something immeasurably more awful in a God revealing Himself!

And then, close as we feel God to be to us, it is undeniable that there is much in His nature that must ever remain mysterious; much that, as far as logical statement goes, seems contradictory. Not mysterious, observe, in such a sense as that we should be justified in giving up thinking of God altogether; but mysterious as implying that, when we have reached certain lines of limitation to our inquiries, there we must stop. We can know God; but there is much relating to God which we cannot know. On the one hand, "clouds and darkness are round about Him," while on the other, "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His seat." Therefore, the true

wisdom must often be perfect silence. So great, so vast is He with whom we have to do, that we can but be still, and know that He is God. And as soon as the soul sets forth to seek God, and as soon as it finds itself in His presence, it learns the worth of silence. It cannot speak in view of infinite greatness, wisdom, and goodness.

But (2) when our religion passes into personal conviction, then again we find the value of silence. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer Thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." When the sense of self-reproach is keen, when the conviction of guilt is fairly awakened, the sinner is dumb before his God. What can he say? Can he give utterance to the overwhelming sense of personal demerit, or express the depth of humiliation in the convicted soul?

And then, when we go forth redeemed and disenthralled, how feebly can words indicate the sense of relief, of gratitude too profound for words! How incompatible with deep and abiding feeling is that sensational and emotional religion which treats loudness, passion, tears, as the fitting and only legitimate

expression of religious conviction! There is no connection between deep feeling and hysterics; rather is hysterical religion shallow and suspicious. It has always seemed to me very observable how offensive to our Blessed Lord was the clamour and confusion of the professed mourners in the house of Jairus. "When He saw the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly, He said, Why make ye this ado, and weep?" and "He put them all out." The disorder and din was hateful to Him. The Lord of peace could not endure senseless noise, the louder and more vehement *because* it was insincere. We know that He could not, for was it not written of Him, that He should not "strive nor cry," nor let His voice be heard in the streets? Why should men put any faith in a sensational religion, or imagine that they will be heard for their much speaking?

In that memorable contest between Jehovah and Baal which took place on Mount Carmel, the noise was on the side of Baal. His votaries called on their god until they were hoarse. From morn till noon, from noon till the evening sacrifice, they shrieked forth their miserable, sanguinary worship. But the prophet of a God of order approached Jehovah with

no howlings. Calmly, deliberately, methodically, he set the stones and placed the sacrifice. In a few quiet, simple words, he called down the presence and blessing of the King of kings. God, my brethren, is "not the author of confusion, but of peace."

Let not noise, then, be the test of truth. Believe nothing merely because it is said by many, and said very loudly. The people of Ephesus cried with a loud voice for the space of two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" but I do not suppose that any truthful person at the end of the two hours was more impressed by her greatness than at the beginning, or more inclined to believe that her image had fallen down from Jupiter. As you value truth and fairness; as it is the sacred duty of every man to form his convictions without fear or favour, his duty for the sake of others as for his own; resolve never to be led by clamour. Let not the strife of tongues tempt you to be hard and undiscriminating towards any. A cause is not less the true and the right cause, because the vulgar and the violent rage against it. I am doubtless asking what is difficult. Just as men in a crowd are tempted to cheer or to groan as do those around them, so are we all conscious of a certain infectious injustice, which tempts us to adopt opinions,

not because we have worked them out in the silence of thought, by dint of careful and accurate reflection, and by unswerving reverence for fact, but because "every one thinks so and so," and it is not convenient or pleasant to be in a minority. Silence, not noise, is the attendant upon true spiritual conviction and manly loyalty to truth.

But silence (3) has its proper relation to spiritual worship. How, it may be asked, can that be? Is not worship the *expression* of devout feeling? Were not speech and song given to man for the very purpose of praising God? I reply, without for an instant controverting this, first, that if it be true (as has already been said) that the contemplation of God's boundless majesty more naturally leads to silence than to words, silence may be connected at least quite as fitly with worship as sound is. And next, I would point out how frequently in Holy Scripture, just as men are called upon to praise God with their voices, so are they called upon to be silent before Him. "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord." "Keep silence before me, O islands." "Commune with thine own heart, and in thy chamber, and be still." "Be still, and know that I am God." "The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

Surely all this points to the fact that silence has its proper relation to worship. Grand beyond words is the utterance of a vast body of worshippers. "I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying : Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." I wish most devoutly that our congregations were more fully alive to the fact that they have in their own power, and that quite independently of clergyman or choir, a means of making divine worship impressive and effective, viz., the audible and hearty share of every individual worshipper in the Church's united worship. The sound of many voices is grand, and silence is grand ; but the timid, apathetic utterances of a mere handful scattered through, it may be, a large congregation; the feeble groaning and muttering of a few worshippers who seem to be afraid of the sound of their own voices; is probably the least impressive and effective mode of Divine worship.

But what I am now pointing out is that silence connects itself with Divine worship. Certainly this truth is distinctly involved in all that Scripture says of the worth of silence, viz., that if we would commune with

our own hearts we must be "still;" we must cease from the stir and fuss and superficial chatter of a superficial world; above all, from the wilfulness of our hearts and their clamorous devices and desires. We must say in the same spirit as the child-prophet of old: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth;" and then, in self-forgetfulness, listen for the voice that is best heard in silence.

But (4, and lastly,) silence has its proper place, its due relation, in regard to our intercourse with our fellow-men. Among the valuable things that some of us have learned from Thomas Carlyle, we shall not forget the value of silence. It seems that there is far too much talking in the world. After all, Carlyle only said what the wise man of old had wisely affirmed, that "in all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." The author of Ecclesiastes reminds us that "there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." The world in general lays far more stress upon the second clause of this passage than upon the first. Great is the blessing of true social intercourse; unspeakable is the help of opening one's heart to the wise and sympathising; and an immense lightener of the burden of life is cheerful,

bright, genial conversation. The very complaint one would be disposed to make is indeed that much talk means little conversation. Not one word is to be said against what is playful and entertaining in human intercourse; genuine wit and humour are healthy and purifying; but the mere unthinking chatter which is the staple of the discourse of some is as dull as it is mischievous, damaging to others from its thoughtless want of charity, damaging in the highest degree to themselves.

For, my brethren, there is a very serious side of this topic. If for every "idle word" that men speak they shall give account at the day of judgment, then to know when to hold our peace becomes a high Christian achievement. Silence rises almost to the dignity of a Christian grace; and the prayer becomes indispensable, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

We return, last of all, to our original thought. The temple of God is to be built in silence. In silent conviction the individual is built up a dwelling for God's Spirit. In silence is His spiritual temple, His Church, built in its glory and beauty, "which temple ye are." It is a silent work,

because it is a spiritual work. "The kingdom of God," to put this truth into New Testament language, "is not in word, but in power." It depends upon the invisible touch of the Divine Master's hand, "whereby all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

II.

WHAT IS "CULPABLE" LUXURY?

1 TIMOTHY vi. 8.

"Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."

"WHAT is Culpable Luxury?" was the title of a thoughtful article which lately appeared in one of our reviews. The writer had met with a statement that some persons in England spend upon themselves annually the income of six hundred labouring families, accompanied by the assumption that such expenditure is selfish and culpable. He comments upon this in a very plausible way. He observes that if the possessor of thirty thousand a year is thus culpable, so is the gentleman with three thousand a year, and so is the tradesman with three hundred a year. Nay, he, adds, the very labouring man is as guilty as the rest "every time he lights his pipe, or drinks his dram."

I make no apology for adverting to this topic in the pulpit, for it is closely connected with that which

ought to be an object of anxious consideration to every Christian man; the regulation of his expenditure, *i.e.*, the mode of living which will not merely be pleasant to himself, but bring the utmost amount of advantage to others. This is a question on which obviously we must be prepared for much diversity of opinion, and in regard to which, therefore, the Christian teacher must refrain from passing judgment on those who may be led to different conclusions from himself. The material point is, that we shall recognize it to be one to be approached with entire sincerity of heart, with earnest desire to find a right answer, even though that answer may make large demands on our self-denial.

How much, then, is it allowable for a man to spend upon himself? What is permissible, and what is "culpable" luxury? Let us weigh the essayist's statement, that a person who spends thirty thousand a year on himself is merely guilty of the same offence (if it be an offence) as that of which we are all guilty. His reason is (and it is this we have to scrutinize closely) that every one who allows himself anything beyond the barest necessaries of life is, in truth, subject to the same condemnation. Now this is not without force, and it seems to fall in

with what St. Paul in my text affirms, viz., that we are to be content with "food and raiment," *i.e.*, with the simple necessaries of life.

First, however, let me observe, that while there is beyond doubt an important truth in the apostle's words, we can easily see that it would be a mistake to press them to the utmost sense of which they are capable. In this very chapter indeed St. Paul addresses himself to the rich as those who did not cease to be rich, even after they had embraced the faith of Christ, and who still retained a higher social position than others. It would have been unmeaning to exhort them to be "ready to distribute," if they had nothing to distribute, if they had sold all they had and given it to the poor. Even as regards the apostle himself, it can scarcely be supposed that he wore just the same coarse and cheap attire as the lowest of the population, or limited himself to just such meagre fare as would prevent starvation. We rather think of him as dressing and faring like other men in his own station, therein following his Divine Master, who came "eating and drinking," *i.e.*, conforming to the ordinary usages of those around Him.

And we have hints not a few that he allowed himself indulgences, if we are to call them so, over

and above the very commonest, coarsest clothing, and the meanest fare. He speaks, *e.g.*, of his books; but books are not absolute necessaries of life. You may indeed observe that they were necessary to his work as a Christian teacher. But that is not the question here. They were not necessary to *existence.* A man can live without books, but he cannot live without food and raiment. And you can speak of books as "necessary" only by so enlarging the sense of the word "necessary" as to include a great many other things besides books. Again, we read that at Rome he lived in his own hired house. A house of his own was not necessary to existence. If you urge that it may have been necessary to his usefulness, I say again that this is enlarging very widely the sense of the word "necessary."

And this points to what is in fact the real element of inaccuracy in the argument. What are "necessaries of life?" The whole fallacy lies in this phrase. Is animal food necessary to existence? Plainly not, if you take the phrase in its strict sense. A cloth coat is not necessary to existence, for we might wear sackcloth, or some other coarse and cheap material. Now, is it really meant that no one has

a right to censure the spendthrift or the sensualist, to regard his expenditure as wasteful, unless he himself wears sackcloth, and lives on bread and water? There is surely an air of paradox about this, which may well lead us to suspect a fallacy. And in this phrase, "a necessity of life," the fallacy lies. Take an instance already adverted to. Books are not necessary to existence. A person might give to an hospital the money he spends on the purchase of them. But in another, and quite as true a sense, books are "necessary." They are not, it is true, absolutely necessary to the keeping life and soul together, but they are necessary, in a general way, to our mental development. To cultivate our minds is not only allowable, but a duty. To starve the higher part of our nature is no more allowable than to starve our bodies.

Do we not then reach this general principle, that any expenditure which is essential to the due development of our nature, which may fairly be regarded as needful to keeping mind as well as body in a healthy condition, is not only allowable, but incumbent; but that any expenditure which oversteps this, which merely ministers to self-gratification, which is not conducive to

mental development and health, and which is indulged in simply from the desire to secure self-gratification, is not defensible on high Christian or moral principles? It will not do to say that even money so selfishly spent does good because it passes into other hands. The most utter Sybarite may thus unintentionally do good. An old Egyptian dissolved a precious pearl, it is said, in the cup from which she drank a health. It would be idle to justify that act on the ground that the merchant received the money which was paid for the pearl. It was nevertheless an extravagant and sinful act. And we need not shrink from the condemnation of a man who spends too much on himself merely because we do not dress like paupers or eat paupers' food. We may spend much more on ourselves than will keep us alive, and yet remain strictly within the rule, *i.e.* the *spirit* of the rule, "having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."

And here let me add that this consideration implies the lawfulness also of needful recreation. A man whose mind is heavily taxed for eleven months is not only availing himself of a legitimate indulgence, but fulfilling an unquestionable duty,

when he goes to the continent for the other month. To him his vacation is a "necessary" of life. So we may justify some amount at least of outlay upon a favourite pursuit. It is not wrong when it constitutes no more than a relaxation. Thus a person might waste a great deal of time and money on a flower-garden, but quite conceivably he might spend time and money on his flowers without sin, if it was the particular means by which he secured himself legitimate recreation. Now does not all this show that it is but a shallow and unsatisfactory way of dealing with the subject to contend that no man has a right to reprobate extravagance and self-indulgence because he allows himself something which can be dispensed with without destroying life?

I know, of course, what may be said in reply. "You hold that everything may be regarded as allowable which is necessary to our due mental development, as well as to our bodily health; but who is to decide what is thus necessary? Will not every one justify his own little extravagant self-indulgence on this pretext?" Undoubtedly I cannot define what is "necessary." It is impossible to present any cut-and-dry rule in a matter which depends upon special circum-

stances, and must therefore be reserved for the judgment of each individual. We may well say that if the sacred teaching had dealt with individual cases, even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. All that any one has a right to require is to be supplied with a principle; its application must depend on himself. And I venture to think that I have supplied a principle. The rule that we are to expend on ourselves no more than will secure the barest necessities of existence is no rational or practical rule. The principle that we are to spend on ourselves what may be needful for the due development of our nature, for the securing as well mental as bodily health, seems to me a sound and a reasonable principle. *Any* outlay which goes beyond this, which does not tend to put us, so to speak, into working order for fulfilling the great purposes of life, which leads us to exceed the amount of relaxation which is essential to the efficient discharge of the work God gives us to do and to our being a blessing to those around us, seems to me to be indefensible, selfish, and contradictory to the spirit of Christianity, as embodied in the words before us.

Here, however, there intervenes a somewhat difficult question, to which we have not alluded, but which cannot

be altogether left out of sight — viz., how far the expenditure is allowable which tends to preserve our social position. Many a man of the simplest tastes and the most abstemious habits maintains a large establishment from the simple feeling that, on the whole, he is doing the most good by not descending from his social position, that it is for the advantage of society that he should incur a much larger expenditure than he feels any desire to incur. On the whole I believe that such a person is right in this, and that passages respecting the rich which are found in this very chapter will bear him out in his belief. One consideration, however, he ought anxiously to keep before his view, viz., that whatever he expends upon things to be regarded as luxuries, should be expended so as to bring as much benefit as possible to society, and to the deserving in society. If, *e. g.*, he has reason to believe that the large amount expended upon the turf in this country, even though it may involve certain incidental advantages (about which I give no opinion), is on the whole disadvantageous to society, and exercises a deteriorating influence on the community, he will take care that his money flows in other channels, where it will carry with it more real good, and help forward true ad-

vancement and civilisation. In short, he will feel himself to be what he is, a "steward" of what God has given him, bound to bring to bear upon his expenditure all the light which sound political economy as well as true Christianity can supply.

And now, out of this very imperfect treatment of a most complicated subject, there emerge two or three practical considerations. 1. There is a large amount of expenditure amongst us which is simply wrong, selfish, and unchristian. We must work ourselves perfectly clear of the notion that the surplus which we may have over and above what is necessary to keep our families in respectability is our own, with which to do exactly what we like. The Bible tells us that it is not our own. It must be dealt with as a trust. It is not indeed necessarily to be given to the poor. We may not be wrong in expending part of it on ourselves. But a trust it is; and, as a trust, it must be carefully, anxiously, intelligently employed. The principle I have laid down may seem scarcely strict enough; but it will be found practically far too strict for many in this wealthy and self-indulgent country. It absolutely condemns the outrageous extravagance in dress to which persons in the upper class yield, who are yet greatly surprised if those in the

lower class catch the infection. It forbids excessive outlay upon what are called the pleasures of the table. It excludes that wretched passion for display which grows out of the desire to rival those about us. It is inconsistent with the growing self-indulgence of our young men; the luxury, and pampering, and love of ease which lead to debt and all the degrading influences which debt too surely brings with it.

If, then, you expend money upon yourself, have a *reason* for doing so. See that your outlay tends to fit you more perfectly for your work in life. I do not insinuate that you are to suspect yourself merely because you are happy. There is not a more detestable nor a more unchristian notion than that we fit ourselves for the *next* world by making ourselves uncomfortable in *this*. Once you have settled in your heart that such and such an indulgence is allowable, take it as from God; enjoy it as from Him, without the wretched, distrustful feeling that it cannot be permitted by God because you happen to like it. When a person has to *invent* discomforts in order to secure self-discipline, you may be pretty sure that he takes a very insufficient view of duty; for nothing is more certain than that the very commonest, homeliest duties involve abundance of self-denial, and that the

self-denials which we devise for ourselves amount to a thinly-disguised self-interest; to what the Scripture very suggestively designates as "will worship."

Finally; remember that it is only pure love to our Saviour and our fellow-creatures which can set us right and keep us right in regard to this difficult matter of which we have been speaking. This thought takes us out of the region of casuistry into a moral atmosphere where we may breathe without distress, and work healthily and effectively. If the sense of Christ's love and of the claims of our fellow-men never relaxed their gentle pressure upon our hearts and consciences, we would be certain to determine these questions wisely and well. Perhaps, indeed, it would not be necessary to raise them. No guide for conscience is, after all, so safe and sure a one as a loving heart. No other guide indeed is thoroughly to be trusted. Though I give all my goods to feed the poor, yet if I lack charity, I do not give so as to please God. Let me but give on the other hand, under the power of this blessed and God-implanted principle, allowing it its full power over my convictions, and then whether I live in the meanest lodging or the noblest mansion, I shall bring honour to Him, and blessing to the world in which He has placed me.

III.

THE HOME-SORROW OF HOSEA.

HOSEA xiv. 8.

"Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found."

WE have to thank the compilers of the new Table of Lessons for allowing us to read this interesting chapter in our Sunday Service. It is a touching delineation of true repentance, not the less applicable to us in our turning to God because it describes the repentance of a nation and not of an individual, or because it was written thousands of years ago.

What was the condition of things when Hosea lived? He belongs to the earliest group of prophets, including also Isaiah, Amos, Jonah, Joel, and Nahum, those who wrote before the consummation of their nation's misfortunes, when good men's hearts were failing them for fear, but when Israel was still a nation. He was, let us remember, much more a prophet of the

ten tribes than of Judah. Those who have studied his prophecy most carefully tell us that he speaks of the hills and valleys of Israel, of its villages and fenced cities, in a way which shows that he had been brought up amongst them; that they had worked themselves into his heart as only that scenery can which is dear from the associations of childhood and home. His words about Judah, on the other hand, are those of a comparative stranger.

Israel and Judah were at this time in a miserable condition. Superstition and moral cowardice marked the conduct of the Kings of Judah and their people. Offering their children to Moloch, "inflaming themselves with idols under every green tree," they proceeded in their downward course till they precipitated their ruin by inviting Tiglath-pileser, King of Assyria, to save them out of the hands of their enemies. Israel had indeed possessed one king, Jeroboam the Second, of courage and energy; but after his death there was a steady decline, ending also in its becoming tributary to the Assyrian king.

The form under which the prophet presents the lesson he would teach his people is very curious. I do not propose to discuss the moral difficulty which is felt by many to exist in reference to it. It is

enough to say that he is directed to take a wife; that she is faithless to him; that she falls lower and lower into infidelity and infamy. The first children born of her receive names expressive of the hopelessness of Hosea's position; but he has still yearnings of affection towards her, breaking through his indignation and disgust. He ventures to cling to the hope that she may yet be reclaimed. He gives the children names expressive of hope; but he fluctuates between hope and despair. The last intimation we receive rather encourages the belief that his forbearance and goodness did win her back at last; but still it leaves, after all, a doubtful and unsatisfactory feeling upon the mind.

In his own distracted home-life the prophet is taught to see a parable of the state of his country. You will recall how familiar this thought is to the old prophets. The repeated departures of their nation from God they speak of again and again as "adulteries." Now their teaching implies two things: first, that they looked on the marriage relation as essentially sacred, as a holy bond; and next, that this relation, so distinctly divine, was the counterpart and type of the relation in which the children of Israel stood to their God, "Thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is

His name." The profligacy and debasement of the estranged wife are but a prophecy of thy iniquity and faithlessness and deep degradation, because thou hast forgotten the covenant of thy God." A great theologian, who had a profounder perception of the moral element in the Old Testament than perhaps any interpreter of our time, writes of this book: "The cardinal doctrine of Hosea's prophecy and of his life, that without which one is as unintelligible as the other, is that man being made in the image of God, all human relationships are images of divine relationships; that through them God acquaints us with His character and government; that in them we are to show forth that character and government."[1]

My brethren, I am persuaded that this is "a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times." It touches the vital question of the sacredness of marriage, and that touches the sacredness of home life. It is about as certain as any future thing can be that we shall see the obligation of the marriage vow deliberately questioned, and at last treated by many as an exploded superstition. In truth,

[1] Maurice's "Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament;" from which many thoughts and phrases in this sermon, and in Sermon VI. have been derived.

the plague has begun. Novels lie on drawing-room tables, and have a great success, which toy with this awful topic, and treat, in a light airy way, with little of reprobation, confessed violations of the Seventh Commandment. Plays which indeed we are not quite bad enough ourselves to write, but which we are quite bad enough to borrow from our French neighbours; plays which would have been hooted off the stage fifty years ago; plays whose interest, such as it is, is derived from the infidelities of married persons; these are educating us to the highly elevating idea that marriage is not a holy estate, on which rests the happiness, the purity, the order of the family, but an arrangement of mere convenience, prompted by passion, or suggested by self-interest.

It is perfectly apparent that the characteristic scepticism of the day is not concerned simply with the motions of molecules, or the date of a gospel, but with elementary morality, the very A B C of right and wrong, with the questions whether a man ought to tell the truth, or reverence his marriage vow, or keep his hands off his neighbour's property. The disintegrating analysis which is now being applied to faith in God, and the hope of immortality, is also being applied, and, as I think, with the most rigorous

logic, to subjects connected with simple homely morality, keeping promises, wedlock, parental obligation, property. Well; it may be right, it may be necessary, in your opinion, thus to apply it. I only say to you, count the cost; make up your mind how far you are prepared to go; do not assume that the movement will stop exactly where you may find it convenient for it to stop. The force which you fondly hope may shatter Christianity and Theism, if called into play at all, will shatter many other things besides; the mutual faith of husband and wife; the reverence due to parents; the beauty of domestic life; the pursuit of truth for its own sake; the confidence which binds men and communities together; the self-sacrifice which redeems life from hopeless selfishness and degradation. The whole method must be false, because it is universally destructive. It may begin with the Creed, but it will end with the Commandments. You cannot apply it to such ideas as faith, God, Christ, immortality, without being prepared unflinchingly to apply it to such other ideas as goodness, purity, honesty, and unselfishness.

And then how about all that we rightly pride ourselves on in our domestic and national life!

Alexandre Dumas, writing in the period of suffering and humiliation which followed the late war, said, in substance, "We must have back in France the ideas of God and marriage." As a man of the world he could not help seeing that the fatal scepticism which had robbed France of these two ideas at once was the origin of all its misfortunes; that inability to look up to a Divine Father had well-nigh destroyed that home life which makes national life possible and strong. To imagine, especially in the case of a people constituted like the English, that you can withdraw the ideas of God and immortality, and yet leave intact the home, and the nation, and society, is about as amazing an hallucination as can be found in this day of eccentric thinking.

I scarcely know whether I should regret that I have paused so long upon this part of my subject; but I must now recal you to this particular chapter, and to the verse I have read, as a beautiful expression of true penitence, of the soul's awakening trust in a loving God, and in His gracious response to such trust. We had better restrict our attention to the words of my text, which are generally understood by expositors to be spoken partly by returning and repentant Israel, and partly by God. Ephraim,

which is of course the designation of the ten northern tribes, exclaims: "What have I to do any more with idols?" The response of God is "I have heard him"—*i.e.* Ephraim—"and observed him." Ephraim then expresses his dependence upon God in the words "I am like a green fir tree," and God reiterates the same truth by rejoining, "From Me is thy fruit found."

First then comes the recoil and disgust of Ephraim when he remembers his past idolatries. It is needless to say that idolatry in the Bible is always associated with moral debasement, with the crushing of what is highest in man. In the very effort to give of that highest to some object of worship less than the highest we are conscious of degradation. We are ashamed of our worship; we come to hate our idol. It is not in the least degree necessary that the idol should be an image of wood or stone, whether beautiful or hideous. It may be money, or position, or a splendid establishment, or æsthetic feeling; it may be senseless parsimony, or drink, or licentiousness; but unless we become hopelessly hardened, there comes sooner or later a sense of debasement, a wonder that we could have brought ourselves so low, and then, by God's grace,

a determination to reserve our supreme devotion for One who is worthy of it, and may claim it,—One to whom we may render it without idolatry. If we have ever known true repentance, we must have known also that feeling which is of its very essence —"What have I to do any more with idols?" It is a critical stage to have reached; the being disgusted with our own idols, and the breaking them once for all. To squander our devotion and trust on what is unworthy of us; to spend our labour on that which satisfieth not, and not to know the unprofitableness and the misery of it; this is the worst state of all; this is mere spiritual death. To hate our idol, even though we confess its power over our souls, is at least an advance, the beginning of spiritual life. But by one manful effort to say—"What have I to do any more with idols?" and to lay our heart's allegiance, and love, and reverence before Him who deserves it and asks it; *this* is repentance or change of mind; *this* is to pass from death unto life. This may God give, for Christ's sake, to those who as yet know not so blessed an experience!

But you may rejoin: "that is a tremendous revolution." Such a resolve demands indeed the very highest form of moral courage. The spell of our

false gods does not withdraw itself all at once. We feel hankerings after the thing that had so long held us beneath its fascination, or we have so long known its tyranny that we tremble under its eye, and are appalled by our own audacity. "Without are fightings; within are fears." And do you think, then, that all this is unknown to God? Do you suppose he is unaware of the struggle in which you are engaged? My text certainly does not say so. To returning Ephraim, His loving response is, "I have heard him and observed him." 'You felt lonely and timid, full of fears and questionings. It was hard to make your resolve, and harder to keep it. You thought you would be very brave, and you were not brave. You felt your self-respect wounded by your cowardice and your failures. You had not the comfort you expected. You seemed to be left alone. You did not know, or you did not feel, that I have never left your side; that every detail of your spiritual experience was exactly known by Me; that I could tell all your alternations of hope and fear, of trust and doubt; that I observed every tear of sorrow you shed, and noted in My book every faintest aspiration for My salvation.'

Is it not quite certain, my brethren, that our

warfare is feeble because we do not believe that God is witnessing and approving and aiding us? From His throne on high He hears and observes us; with infinite sympathy He identifies Himself with His struggling children, and will make them "more than conquerors, through Him who has loved them." In this sense, most truly, "the joy of the Lord is our strength." He who said to Nathaniel, "When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee," is the observer of our most secret experiences, prizing every right aspiration, pitying every weakness, bearing with every inconsistency, knowing our frame, remembering that we are but dust; and never resting until He presents us "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." But He would not have us forget our weakness, and if we are pluming ourselves on our own strength of resolve, we shall learn, by a very painful process indeed, that it will not stand for an instant the shock of temptation, or the allurements of pleasant sin.

We are glad then, to hear Ephraim recognizing his own weakness in the words "I am like a green fir tree;" "the life within me is a struggling life, precarious, fragile, tender. I do not think myself

a giant of the forest; I know I am but a slight and delicate sapling; protect me from the winter storm and the summer heat, and help me to bring forth fruit unto life eternal." It is the same figure as that used by the Psalmist, "I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever." And then we have the response of God, deepening Ephraim's humility and trust. "Yes; *from Me is thy fruit found.* I have chosen and ordained thee that thou shouldst go and bring forth fruit, and that thy fruit should remain; but in this My expectation is the pledge that what I require I shall enable thee to render. Trust me fully and I shall never leave nor forsake thee." Yes, my brethren; the great spiritual need of our souls is to trust God more perfectly, to lay the full weight of our spiritual being on His promises and His character; not to trust Him a little and ourselves much, but to say out of the fulness of our hearts, "*all* my fresh springs are in Thee." Believe me, such trust means strength and not weakness. It is manly; it is truthful; it is self-respecting; it supplies us with the secret of true courage; it lifts us to "the measure of the stature o the fulness of Christ."

IV.

PROTESTANTISM NOT MERELY NEGATIVE.

ROMANS xiv. 4.

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth?"

THERE is no surer evidence of change in thought and feeling than the changes which take place in regard to words. Of none is this more obviously true than the word "Protestant." It is decidedly out of fashion. Some, who are not actually of the unreformed Communion, employ it with the utmost acrimony and scorn. A "Protestant" is, in their eyes, a tasteless bigot; an enemy of everything artistic, refined, and devout; a "Philistine," and a malcontent; the impersonation of everything vulgar, ranting, and illiberal.

Under the alarm inspired by such terrible assaults, the word is used timidly and apologetically,

even by those who are not quite prepared to give up what it represents. Shall we abandon an old friend? Is the word no help towards preserving what it stands for? Is it not a good word, to be retained and valued? And is not the fact of its being out of fashion just the very reason why, like many other good things which are also out of fashion, it should be held fast, and fearlessly used? I for one feel no doubt as to the answer. I am not ashamed to *be* a Protestant, and therefore to call myself one. And I am anxious to assign some reasons why I was never less inclined to part with the word, or that for which it stands. And in attempting to do this I shall have to lead you to consider some of the most vital truths of the Gospel, so that we shall not part from the subject without having been brought into the presence of thoughts of the most serious and solemn kind.

First, then, I suppose that some of our æsthetic friends dislike Protestantism mostly on æsthetic grounds. They think it is synonymous with meanness, tastelessness, and vulgarity in Divine ministrations; they like beautiful music, noble churches, grandeur in worship, and they think that Protestantism is adverse to these. And in point of fact

it is these influences, far more than doctrinal considerations, which attract young persons to a faith utterly unlike that of their childhood. Now there is in all this a curious mixture of plausibility and inaccuracy. Seemliness in Divine worship is doubtless unspeakably important, and Protestantism has not hitherto had much to boast of in this regard; but who that has been in Romish countries and observed the frequent levity of the worshippers, the vulgar tawdriness, often indeed the uncleanliness of the churches, can deny that the fault in this matter lies not all with one side; that the devotion of Romanism and the unimpressiveness of Protestantism have both been exaggerated?

As to architecture, let us grant that Protestantism, until the late Gothic revival, has had but little, save St. Paul's Cathedral, to boast of since the Reformation. But it may be asked, how many great churches has the unreformed Faith to boast of within the same period? Except perhaps the cathedral of Orleans, nothing has been done during these years by the Church of Rome worth mention. The fact seems to be that the absence of pure taste and of zeal for church building was not so much a characteristic either of Protestantism or of

Romanism as of the age itself. Certainly neither of these has any particular reason to cast stones at the other.

As to music we find ourselves on still stronger grounds. I shall ever maintain that to Protestantism is due the greatest, by which I mean the most religious music ever given to the world. On the other hand, it was Romanism, not Protestantism, which allied the strains of the opera house with the worship of the Church. And I think I am affirming a fact when I say that some of the greatest masters, unquestionably capable of composing deeply religious music, reserve for their so called secular compositions a seriousness and grandeur which they seem to lay aside when they have to write for the Church.

Into the relation of literature to Protestantism, I cannot and need not enter. None will join in this scornful talk about Protestantism who perceive that without the Reformation our national literature never would have been what it is; and that everywhere Protestantism has kindled a mental activity and literary vitality, which Romanism has steadily tended to extinguish.

But let us pass beyond the merely æsthetic view

of the subject. A more serious charge is launched against Protestantism. It is said to be merely negative. It can destroy, but not build up. It only "protests against" certain beliefs; it substitutes nothing for those beliefs. Now this is just the point upon which I would fix your thoughts. Protestantism is *not* simply negative. It is much nearer to the truth, to treat Protestantism as on the contrary the assertion of important positive beliefs, and to maintain that Romanism it is which denies certain great definite principles of our spiritual being, and which therefore with most perfect accuracy of language may be characterized as "negative." Two or three of these only I can now hastily indicate, by way of illustration.

1. Take the sacredness of national and family life. This is a positive conviction. We do not merely "protest against" Ultramontanism and the Confessional. We set against these a definite truth, viz., that national and family life are divine; not mere conventional arrangements, which may be set aside under certain circumstances, but essentially of God, and in a religious spirit to be honoured and upheld. Everywhere throughout the civilized world is there an irresistible revolt, even amongst

nations hitherto most loyal to the Papacy, against the revolutionary and disorganizing claim of what is termed "the Church," to tamper with the sacredness of national and family life. There is passing over us at this moment a strong wave of the mighty tide which began rolling at the Reformation. Far more indeed on this ground than on any distinctively theological principles, did the Teutonic races at that crisis deliberately disallow the claim of priests to encroach upon the Divine order, revealing itself in the nation and the family. With that order, Sacerdotalism is as impious and revolutionary an interference as Communism; and while mediæval sentimentalists would fain undo what Englishmen have been steadily constructing for three hundred years, Christendom, yes, Roman Catholic Christendom, has risen up as one man to assert that whether the thing called "the Church" be, or be not, divine, the nation and the family at all events are undoubtedly of God, and that as Ultramontanism must not destroy the one, the Confessional certainly shall not be permitted to break down the other. It is at this critical moment, when all Catholic Europe is, unconsciously or not, affirming the distinctive principle of Protestantism, that certain

Englishmen so far forget their national traditions as to put contempt on the name of "Protestant," and to reassert a claim which the rest of the civilized world is rejecting with scorn. I am not ignorant of the theories by which they would evade the logical consequences of their doctrine; nor do I suppose that they deny in so many words the sacredness of the nation and the family. To all such distinctions and theories there is, however, one sufficient answer, which Englishmen will never fail to appreciate. That is, in fact, the history of their own country; the long record of the struggle of Sacerdotalism to break down national life, and of Protestantism to assert and preserve it.

At all events, observe that here at least Protestantism is not destructive, but constructive; not negative, but positive. To a definite denial it opposes a doctrine just as definite. Against the pretensions of priests, which they think fit to call the Divine authority of the Church, it sets a conviction of the most high and religious kind, viz., that national life is a divine thing, upon which no other thing also calling itself divine may encroach; that family life, inseparably connected with national life, and sacred too, must be kept clear from all influ-

ences that would subordinate the authority of the father to that of the spiritual director. This conviction may be right or wrong, but at any rate it is simply untrue to say that in respect to it Protestantism is negative. It is, indeed, the denial of a false doctrine; but it connects the denial of the false with the assertion of the true.

The next positive truth to which Protestantism witnesses, is (2) the sacredness of individual conviction. I might have said the right of private judgment, but individual conviction ought always to be regarded as a duty rather than a right. In regard, then, to the great question, "What is truth?" the determination of it is a matter ultimately and absolutely between God and myself. I need not, and I could not if I would, transfer my responsibility to think the thing that is true, and to hate and abhor lies, to any living man, or any corporation whatsoever. You will observe that Protestantism does not simply aver that what is called the Church is not a safe and sufficient guide into truth. It does not simply say (what yet would be strictly true), "We have studied the history of this clerical corporation, and we find, as a matter of fact, that it is not to be trusted; that the light

that is in it has often turned out to be but darkness." This would be true, but confessedly it would be negative. Protestantism goes much further, for it affirms a positive truth, namely, the direct intercommunion of the individual soul with the Spirit of the living God. I may dispense with the intervention of ecclesiastic or church, and go directly to the Fountain of truth. It is not that God dwells in a certain clerical corporation, and then that if I connect myself with that, I am putting myself in the way of profiting by a certain deposit of truth, which it is the business of that corporation to guard and transmit. It is that I, being God's child, may go directly to my Father, who has personal relations to me as His child, and that in His light I shall see light. Because I am His child, He will guide me into the truth that is good for me.

And unquestionably the reverence for truth as an awful thing outside myself, to which I must bow, though the heavens should fall, is a feeling profoundly characteristic of Protestantism. Luther struck the key note of the Reformation when, in his apparent helplessness, he exclaimed, "Here I stand; I can do nothing; the Lord help me." "I am an old man," said Dr. Döllinger, "and can

not go into the presence of God with a lie in my right hand." Say not then that Protestantism is a negation. It is Romanism that, in practice at least, (I should say in theory also,) denies the vital truth, that the Spirit of God is given to every man who asks God for it through Christ, and that by going straight to the source of truth, we shall individually receive such truth as will avail for our individual salvation. Be this true or false, it is plainly not a negation, and the system which affirms it is assuredly not merely negative.

The last positive truth to which Protestantism witnesses, and of which Sacerdotalism in all forms is a virtual denial, is the right of direct approach, through Christ, to God. As in the matter of truth, so in the matter of salvation, it is absolutely a dealing between God and the individual soul. We do not approach Him through a clerical caste. Our acceptance with Deity does not hinge upon the consecration or the non-consecration of the Eucharist by a priest, or the giving or withholding of absolution by one who, according to distinguished divines of our own Church, not only can declare, but "convey" forgiveness of sins. To his own master, as St. Paul reminds us in my text, every

man stands or falls. "Every man shall bear his own burden."

So far, I admit, the doctrine has been stated in a negative form. Now, however, remember that what makes the interposition of the priesthood so impious and so anti-Christian, is, that it is a virtual denial of the positive doctrine of Protestantism, viz., the right of every Christian man, because he has a great High Priest, divine and human, to go directly to the throne of grace, and there (without the intervention of any living creature) to ask and obtain absolution and release *immediately* from his Heavenly Father. Here it is Protestantism that is positive, Romanism negative. As we have just seen that Sacerdotalism denies the doctrine of a Divine Spirit, having personal and individual relations to the human soul, so it denies the doctrine of a Divine Redeemer, an all-sufficient Priest, through whom we have the right directly to approach our God.

And when it is contended that between Sacerdotalism and Protestantism there is an ineradicable distinction, and that the Reformation was a change of the most vital kind, this is not the harsh word of an illiberal Ultra-protestantism. It is equally the conviction of more learned and clear-headed

Sacerdotalists. They do not disguise their utter aversion to that change. And it is the testimony of the Episcopate, usually so guarded in its utterances, that there is within our own communion what one of the Bishops characterized as the "Counter-reformation;" in other words, a systematic combination of certain of its clergy to undo what was achieved at that time.

As to the remedy, who indeed can speak with confidence? Who can be sure that there *is* a remedy? Who shall say that the disease has not eaten too deeply into the vitals of the English Church ever to be eradicated? At all events, enlightened Churchmen will consult most effectually for the interests of the nation and the Establishment by making it evident that they cannot be satisfied with negations, that they are concerned above all things to deepen men's faith in the great positive truths which are now imperilled, and to see that the imperishable and unchanging is not overlooked in the rush and scramble of merely ecclesiastical conflicts.

Of one thing we may be assured, that as far as Protestantism is content to stand on the defensive, so far it will be weak. When it achieved great

things it did not come before the world "in a bondman's key, with 'bated breath, and whispering humbleness." Whether the Darwinian theory be true or not in the material world, it is abundantly traceable in the history of religious opinion. The weakest goes to the wall. Vagueness, timidity, illogical compromise, are fatal. He who has courage to define his position, and then to occupy it with no secret distrust, becomes at once conscious of a power by which he shall "put to flight the armies of the aliens."

V.

TRUST WITHOUT CALCULATION.

JOB xiii. 15.

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

THE friends of Job have their counterparts in every age of the world. Whenever men are in trouble, there are those who undertake the task of comforting, without any qualifications for it. They lack sympathy. They cannot put themselves in the place of those who are tried, or they will not take the trouble to do so; and they lack sympathy for the most part because they want experience. Possibly they have had few afflictions, or they have not by nature particularly fine moral sensibilities. And so, when it is expected that they will minister comfort, they bring forth all the stock sentiments which those who are *not* in trouble squander upon those who *are*, the respectable com-

monplaces which, like ready-made garments, do not in reality fit *any*, because they are meant to fit *all*.

Be sure, then, that no wise man will needlessly proffer himself as a comforter. The wiser he is, the more profoundly he will shrink from intruding upon the sanctity of an afflicted soul. It is such shallow talk as the friends of Job indulged in which drives the sorrowing and the suffering well nigh crazy. There is one thing worse than utter desertion, worse than absolute isolation, and that is the anguish of being obliged to listen to consolers who cannot console, to platitudes which only fret, and mock, and weary. It is not that what these comforters say is necessarily untrue or inconclusive, but it is that you feel they are saying it only because it is the usual thing to say. They have never gone back to first principles; and no man will ever speak a word to comfort or instruct his fellow-creatures who has not got below the surface, and faced the hard facts of existence, and wrought out for himself the perplexing problems of our being. Would that men who take religion second-hand from those about them, who hold certain views because others hold them, and utter certain sentiments because they have heard others utter them, would but

refrain from attempting to console or instruct, until God gives them the qualifications for so sacred and so arduous a function.

Now I think it will suggest itself that the difference between Job and his friends is exactly this, that he had gone down to first principles and that they had not. You can trace beneath all his utterances a something which enables him to withstand all their poor, superficial talk. What that "something" was seems to be well set forth in the words of my text. It was a trust in God, *i.e.*, in God's character, which not even the most crushing stroke of Divine power could destroy. "Let Him come to me as an adversary; let His dealings look like the most unmitigated harshness; let no glance of loving-kindness brighten His countenance; let Him, as He has taken my property, my children, my health, take my life also; yet, in the anticipation of all this, I will trust Him still; the ground of my confidence will remain unassailed and unassailable; I will hold fast to His faithfulness even when I cannot trace it, to His love, even when appearances seem most to contradict it."

Now here we have faith, or trust (for you will

never understand the meaning of "faith" unless you remember that it is identical with trust) in its most concentrated form. Here is the pure element detached from every ingredient which does not strictly enter into its very idea. We shall surely find profit in looking steadily at it when thus presented to us, and if it appear to be something too transcendent for us, feeble and faint-hearted, to attain, it will yet be for our soul's good to fix the aim which we may notwithstanding feel it well-nigh impossible to reach.

And if we would understand how trust at last reaches this uncalculating perfection, let us consider for a moment how it is that trust builds itself up in regard to an earthly benefactor or father. It begins with kind acts. Some one does something very generous and disinterested towards us. The child becomes aware of the ever-present care and self-denying goodness of the parent. One act, observe, does not usually furnish a rational ground of trust. Only when that act of kindness is followed by others does settled trust arise. Hence trust is, in fact, confidence in the character of another. The child, after long experience of a parent's love, acquires such perfect faith in the parent's character

that it can trust even when he acts with seeming unkindness.

Usually, I say, this is not reached through one, or two, or three acts of kindness; but yet there are cases in which even one action would command the homage of our hearts. It is said that, during the terrible days of the Commune in Paris, a young priest happened to be in the same cell with a prisoner who hourly expected to be summoned to execution. The story sets forth that the priest said to his companion, "You have a wife and children to whom your death will be an irreparable calamity; I am a lonely man, for whose death *no* hearts will break; the world will lose far less by my removal than by yours; so when your name is called, I shall answer for you, and pass cheerfully to the doom from which you will thus be saved." It is added that he was as good as his word, and furnished a noble exemplification of the Divine saying—"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Now, even though this was but *one* act of self-sacrificing love, even though he never did, and never had the opportunity of doing, another, yet this one and only act established an all-powerful claim upon

the utmost devotion and reverence and affection of him whom he had thus truly befriended. The parallel is obvious. It is by one transcendent act of love that Christ has fixed for ever His claim upon our whole "heart, and soul, and mind, and strength." He has given *Himself* for us. How fully we may trust Him would have been evidenced, even if we had no single additional proof of His love, by His dying, "the just for the unjust," to win us back to Himself. But observe, brethren, this is the point. However we reach it, this trust is for the man an all-powerful fact ever after. Once it is placed beyond any question that God loves us; once trust becomes the settled habit of our souls; once we acquire such a view of His character that we can make it the foundation of every hope for this world and the next; once it is to us as the footing beneath us, even "though the hills be removed, and the mountains cast into the sea;" then we will not allow any subsequent chastening, any "frowning providence," to shake our faith in unchanging love. The attitude of our souls is, "I know in whom I have believed;" 'I know not why He deals with me thus; "clouds and darkness are round about Him." The heaven is as brass above my head, the earth beneath as iron.

He may strip me bare of all human blessings, as He did Job; but, like Job, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." He can but take my life, and even that will not shake my unswerving conviction that He doeth all things well.' "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Brethren, observe that trust such as this, in common with all real trust, is eminently rational. It rests on evidence. We have *proved* God worthy of our heart's confidence. Between us and Him there is "a covenant, ordered in all things and sure," and no subsequent experiences can rob us of a trust, which rests upon a promise as unchanging as Him who made it, a love which will not fail until Deity is displaced from the throne of the universe. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation."

What I desire now to bring chiefly into prominence is this, that the trust which is first built up of benefits received, gradually becomes uncalculating. So, indeed, it is with trust in our fellow-men. It begins

in the experience of what they have done for us, but after a time all considerations of loss or gain disappear. We reverence and love them for that which is good and noble in themselves. Even so, the highest reverence and devotion towards God is disinterested. Self, and what self may win or miss, fade out of view. God and Christ become all in all. The Lord of our hearts, the "chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely," so aggrandises (if that be not too bold a word to employ) the worship of the heart, that self virtually disappears. No words are felt to be exaggerated in expressing the joyful and absolute self-forgetfulness of him who is dwelling in the presence of Infinite Perfection. The almost startling language of Job is felt to be but the simple expression of implicit confidence in perfect goodness: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

I remember having read in the life of Henry More, the celebrated Cambridge divine of the seventeenth century, celebrated alike for goodness and learning, that when he was a lad at Eton, bewildered by wild and dreadful Calvinistic notions, as many truthful and gentle spirits were at that day, and musing concerning these things in the ground belonging to the

college, he did (to use his own words) thus seriously and deliberately conclude within himself,—"If I am one of those predestinated unto hell, where all things are full of nothing but cursing and blasphemy, yet will I behave myself there patiently and submissively towards God, and if there be one thing more than another that is acceptable to Him, that will I set myself to do with a sincere heart, and to the utmost of my power. Being certainly persuaded that if I thus demeaned myself, He would hardly keep me long in that place; which meditation of mine" (he adds) "is as firmly fixed in my memory, and the very place where I stood, as if the thing had been transacted but a day or two ago." [1]

I venture to adduce this curious passage, first, because it shows how a truthful and devout mind will snap the cords with which a cruel theology attempts to bind it down; and next, because it illustrates just that uncalculating confidence in God, that unselfish longing that whatever may befall us may

[1] "À peine entré dans les voies de la perfection chrétienne, St. François de Sales fut pris d'une affreuse tentation de désespoir, et se persuada qu'il était inévitablement destiné au supplice éternel. Un jour . . . . il s'écria: 'Mon Dieu! puisque je dois avoir le malheur de vous haïr éternellement, faites du moins que sur la terre je vous aime de tout mon cœur.'"—*Mysticisme au temps de Fénelon.*—M. Matter, p. 84.

work for His glory, which is concentrated in the words before us, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Something, perhaps, of the same truth is enshrined in those well-known words of Milton, profoundly true, and profoundly spiritual, though misapplied by the false one who speaks them—

> "The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

Believe it, my brethren; believe it. We indulge in no speculations as to the localities beyond this visible scene of order and rebellion, and consequently of happiness and grief; but of this we may be certain, that a heart at one with God, knowing no will but His, perfect in its trust, carries within it peace and heavenly-mindedness wherever it may abide in this wide universe; while a heart distrustful of God, swept by gusts of passion and self-will, lacking the one feeling which alone gives stability, can find heaven nowhere. No conditions of outward peace and order can make the soul peaceful and orderly which creates troubles within itself, which wilfully detaches itself from the source of true repose, which frets under Christ's easy

yoke and light burden, which turns upon the hand that would guide it lovingly and wisely.

I am aware that I have been speaking throughout this sermon of the very highest form of trust, the trust that weathers every conceivable trial, and defies utterly the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." I might have passed on to show you that there may be genuine faith which does not reach this highest point; that the trust of which my text speaks constitutes our crowning privilege, the attainment only of the few, and that, therefore, none need be dispirited because he is not conscious of possessing that unfaltering and uncalculating faith. Thank God, faith may be genuine even when it is feeble. Small hope for you and me if it were not so! Thank God, there is that quality in *all* faith, though it be as a grain of mustard seed, which carries with it enormous power, even to the removing of mountains.

But this I say finally, that to the faith which I have been describing all faith must *approximate;* that so far as faith falls short of it, it is imperfect; and that if we do not aim at the highest, we shall be only too likely to remain without faith in *any* degree. Thank God, the most trembling,

inconsistent, flickering trust, if it be but real trust, trust in a Father and an All-powerful Redeemer, is life and salvation; but yet we may not rest absolutely satisfied till heart and soul repose in unbroken stillness upon the bosom of our Father and our God.

VI.

THE TEMPLE VISION OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH vi. 8.

"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."

IN this chapter the prophet describes his designation to his office. It was conveyed to him in a vision; and when we hear of a vision we are apt to think of something fantastical and unreal. To the prophet it was far otherwise. It spoke to him of that which was intensely real. It assigned him his work in the world, and gave its whole meaning to that work. And so, when you come to consider the vision, you find in it nothing which had sprung from a riotous imagination, nothing wild, fanciful, or feverish. The outward details are slight and simple, and every one of them is connected with great spiritual realities.

It is indeed most remarkable how the Jewish

prophets, constantly moving in a region of vision, giving play to their imaginations, are yet far indeed from becoming dreamy and unreal, are always saved from overstepping the due limits of the imagination, are always terribly and yet soberly in earnest, and ever seem to be leading their countrymen away from illusions and the worship of appearance to the dread realities which are not less realities because they are unseen. We in no wise undervalue the inspiration which produced such a result when we say that thus we are taught that imagination is a God-implanted faculty, and a very serviceable one, and that the attempt to extirpate it is as perilous as it is ineffectual. Imagination, then, is not an evil thing, but a true faculty, capable, no doubt, of fearful abuse, and therefore the chief faculty which false religion unduly and dangerously develops; still a divine faculty, which helps us to rise above appearance to the eternal and the unchangeable. Even science cannot dispense with its aid. It is given to lead us to truth, not to interpose between us and truth. To try to crush it would be ridiculous if it were not mischievous.

But, to fix our thoughts on the vision; it came

upon the prophet "in the year that King Uzziah died." This king was, on the whole, a wise, active, and pious ruler, but his end was melancholy. He attempted, we are told in Chronicles, to burn incense in the Temple, but was smitten with leprosy, of which he miserably died. We are not told whether this vision was seen just before, or just after, his death. In either case, it was probably, to the prophet, a depressing time. He may have been expecting to hear that the poor stricken man was gathered to his fathers, or have been observing how soon he and his services were forgotten. To the Temple the prophet directed his steps and there, too, we may believe, he saw much to sadden him. In that place of wonder and mystery, he saw men going in and out who had but little consciousness of any wonder or mystery. He saw those who ministered at the altars, and on whose foreheads was written, "Holiness to the Lord," discharging their functions without reverence or faith. He felt, perhaps, a sense of oppression and death overhead; a feeling, as it has been well expressed, "like that of a hot evening before a thunderstorm, when all looks serene, but there is no breath of air."

Falling into a trance, though with his eyes open, and still beholding the holy building, he sees enthroned there the Lord of the Temple, and instead of being filled by the hurrying and chattering crowds, every nook and court is bathed in the light of His presence, and thronged by the thousands of His train. "Above the throne stood the Seraphim," those mysterious forms respecting which our knowledge is so scanty. We know only that they appeared as winged creatures; what was their exact form the prophet does not indicate. Something, indeed, we learn from their position and movements. With two wings they covered their faces. Pure spirits as they were, they could not look upon the awful One upon the throne. With two wings they covered their feet, as though they would hide themselves and their very perfections from that dread Presence. With two wings they flew, showing their freedom and readiness to go wheresoever they were sent. It is not, surely, fanciful to discover in this a hint of the deep reverence, the self-renouncing humility, the readiness to do His will, which lies beneath all true worship.

But what was the utterance of the Seraphim?

Here, in writings supposed to be full of Eastern imagery, we might have expected some gorgeous accumulation of superhuman glories. If the prophet's imagination had run riot, he would doubtless have indulged in fantastic word-painting, in laboured delineations of a visible heaven akin to those of Swedenborgianism. But he withdraws us from material things, touching lightly on the form of the Seraphim, checking himself when he tells of the glory round the throne. On what, then, *does* he fix our thoughts? What is the central point of the vision? What was it that filled him with such unspeakable awe? It was the cry which rang through the mighty multitude, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God of Hosts." The most tremendous thought which was present to him at this overwhelming moment was the holiness of God. No splendour it was which the eye could see, no harmony which the ear could hear, but something of which descriptions and symbols offer no conception; of which, however, we men, with spiritual natures, *can* take cognizance, *the holiness of God!*

My brethren, it has mostly been the method of religious revivalists to expatiate on the *power* of God, His being able to crush us as we crush a

moth; to present the march of His government as the movement of a great Juggernaut's car; to aim at awakening an unreasoning dread of a fierce unknown vengeance; to emphasize the one idea, "resist God; but take the consequences." This is, in fact, the gospel of hell-fire, and, preached in its baseness and unrelenting cruelty, it never converted, I do solemnly think, a single human soul, though it has made many atheists, and helped to crowd many lunatic asylums. I say that mere power does not touch my moral nature at all, though it may frighten me, and that if it has ever frightened me, it ceases in time even to do that. Mere power, it is obvious, the mere unlimited ability to torture or destroy me, leaves my conscience exactly as it had been. There is no point of contact between the two.

And then these assertions of superhuman power leave men so hopeless, they encounter such resistance from human instincts—that, to mitigate them, men introduce innumerable qualifications, reservations, and neutralisations, until a fatal sense of unreality comes over the mind, and a most deplorable and fatal weakening takes place of the one central conception upon which all true religion must be

founded, and which filled Isaiah with profoundest awe, when he listened to the cry of the Seraphim, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts."

That thought it is which goes right to the conscience. To feel myself brought into the presence of infinite purity is very awful. To hear the voice of Him who is nearer to me than any living creature, laying upon me the injunction "Be holy, for I am holy;" that appeals to what is highest in me; it is a word which I dare not disregard. Religion at once ceases to be a nice calculation of possible consequences, a selfish appeal to the prudential, a commercial weighing and balancing of what may or may not come of resisting unlimited power. *Then* and *there* the man feels himself condemned. It is not a future state, but his *present* state, which makes him tremble. This, my brethren, is the true conviction of sin, which you rightly hold to be the preliminary to the acceptance of the message of love in which God invites us to be holy as He is holy, and through the mediation of His Son, and the influence of His own Spirit, makes it possible for us to respond to that invitation. The cry of the Seraphim was uttered with veiled faces, and if these pure beings

hid themselves from the Holy Presence of which they sung, it was no wonder that Isaiah had wrung from him the self-abasing words, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."

But the Seraphim closed their song with the words, "The whole earth is full of His glory." Isaiah might have felt that in the heaven of heavens His glory dwelt, but even this earth; this scene of confusion and pain and degradation, where relentless tyrants were trampling down millions of suffering creatures made in God's image—

> "Where men sit, and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs;
> Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies;
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs"—

this earth was filled with the Divine glory, was no longer a mere dismal prison, but the very house of God and gate of heaven.

And now comes the actual designation of the trembling and awe-stricken prophet to his high function. A live coal is borne from the altar by one of the Seraphim, and a single touch from it

upon his lips purifies both heart and lips, and makes him wholly God's prophet. You see that the preparation for that solemn function did not consist in his being encouraged to consider himself holier and more eloquent than the rest of the people. What he had to learn was that he was himself cold, impure, sin-bound, unrenewed in heart, and of stammering lips. He must be made to feel that whatever was wrong in his people he shared.

And, my brethren, whether we be clergymen or not, it is perfectly certain that if we seek to bless and influence others we must pass through precisely the same experience as marked off the prophet for his high mission. We must first learn our own sinfulness; learn it not as a mere phrase or theological dogma, but as a simple expression of a fact, which has been brought home to us, because we have stood in the awful presence of a holy God, and have there found ourselves to be just as weak and sinful as the weakest and most sinful of those to whom we are to be sent. And then a coal, kindled by the fire of God's love, must be brought to us from the altar of sacrifice, whose touch must warm our cold hearts, and unfix our mute lips. Real self-abasement, and the glow of

love to Him who has given Himself a sacrifice for us, of love to our brethren, awakening the will to sacrifice ourselves for them; this is the experience through which everyone must pass who is to do—as all, laity and clergy, ought to do—the work of God in the world. And then when from the throne the voice is heard which incessantly speaks to human hearts: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" the response will come, at once prompt and humble, "Here am I. Send me." It is not only that Isaiah is ready to offer himself, but that he is called and must go. It was precisely the same experience as passed upon the greatest preacher of the Gospel to whom the world ever listened, and compelled him to exclaim, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

And yet, my brethren, when we hear what the message was which the prophet was given to deliver we are sensible of a great disappointment. We expect something gladsome and triumphant; we find it as sad as any that was ever given to a human creature. He was to make the heart of that people fat, and their ears heavy, and to shut their eyes. Those are very stern words. I do not

think they countenance the Calvinistic tenets of predestination and reprobation. I do not understand them as though God ever hardened anyone's heart who did not himself first harden it persistently and criminally. But this they do teach us (and no more momentous message was ever delivered by a prophet), that the most sacred things, the holy ordinances of religion, the duties and the symbols of the Temple, things which the Jews of that time professed to hold in boundless veneration, if they do not lead us up to God, only make our eyes dim, and our ears deaf, and our hearts dull and stupid. They do this, just because they *are* sacred. It is an appalling thing that to men dulled and stupefied by the potions which they administer to themselves, the most precious gifts of God, the instruments of His grace, the signs of His presence become themselves potions.

It was a terrible message for a prophet to deliver. But happily it did not stop there. He was indeed to foretell the desolation of the land; but beyond the desolation there was the hope, the "cloud no bigger than a man's hand," which might not be very magnificent, but which saved him from despair. As the life is in a teil tree, or an oak,

even when they cast their leaves, so in apostate Israel there was yet a holy seed, an "election within the election," which gave hope that the nation was yet a sacred and immortal thing.

It is thus, my brethren, that truth moves forward in the world. It is first the possession of the few, and they hold it in trust for the many. All the graver responsibility for those who think they have possession of that truth which the world needs. What manner of men ought they to be in all holy conversation and godliness! What need of the coal from God's altar to touch their *hearts* and make them loving and true and brave; to touch their *lips*, and make them wise, winning, and courageous! "Who is sufficient for these things?" unless God takes away our pride and cold-heartedness, unless the zeal of His house consumes us, unless we go forth, not as drudges and hirelings, but as the heralds of His message to the world He has redeemed.

VII.

TOO LATE.

ECCLESIASTES xi. 4.

"He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap."

THE writer of this book is unquestionably tempted to a sceptical and despondent spirit. Some persons who are sensible of the mystery of life, its gloom as well as its brightness, its painful as well as its pleasant elements, are yet so practical that to encounter a difficulty merely supplies them with a reason for bracing themselves to remove it. Others are haunted by the gloom and the pain; go mourning all their days; and whenever it is possible to take either a dark or a bright view, have a constitutional disposition rather to choose the dark.

To this last class the "Preacher" plainly belonged. But there is something within him besides which saves

him from hopelessness. You expect him perhaps to end by abandoning effort; by settling down to live by that deadliest and most dreadful rule of faith and duty—"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But no; with all his scepticism he still calls men to work. What their hand finds to do, they are to do it with their might. If they cast their bread upon the waters, they will find it after many days. In the morning they are to sow their seed, and in the evening to withhold not their hand. And in the words before us, he warns his hearers against that very habit of mind to which we might have supposed he was himself peculiarly inclined; the habit of observing the wind when it was time to sow, and of looking at the clouds when it was time to reap—*i.e.*, in words divested of the figurative, to falter in the presence of duty from an exaggerated sense of the difficulties which beset it, to pause and speculate when the time has arrived to obey and to act.

Now this evil tendency, of which I intend to speak to-day, takes one of two forms. First, it has a grosser and a commoner form, viz., when men falter and spend their time weighing and measuring difficulties, merely from the power of an indolent and self-indulgent nature. They are like one who delays to

the very last moment at the warm fireside, and in the well-lit room, and amongst the pleasant faces and cheerful voices, because he shrinks from going out into the cold, dark, lonely world outside. To them religion and duty seem chilling and gloomy, and they put off the decisive effort to the last possible instant, often, alas, so long that they hear the words "too late," at the journey's end.

Of one thing I am quite sure, that amidst the blessings, so many and so undeserved, which God bounteously reserves for the sons of men, there are absolutely *none* for the indolent. I cannot conceive any fault of character so essentially fatal as indolence. Men with even gross defects of other kinds rise in this world to the highest point of success, aye, and to the very highest achievements of duty and faith, but never, never, the indolent man. I can think of any, however inconsistent he may be, who has yet the power of effort within him, winning his way at last into the kingdom of heaven, but I cannot imagine an easy, self-indulgent, and therefore indolent man, finding his way there at all. Upon not a few in this luxurious age, upon our young people particularly, upon our young men (I fear I must add) most of all, hangs this terrible blight of an ease-

loving, lounging, apathy of nature. The only effort they very much care to make is the effort studiously to avoid effort of every kind. The painful facts of life are not faced, but put aside. The great aim is not to fulfil duty, but to evade the disagreeable. They will not sow if there be any threatening of storm; they will not reap if there be a cloud in the sky.

But this tendency, condemned in my text, frequently takes a less contemptible, but not less injurious, form. Persons by no means addicted to self-indulgence waver in the presence of duty, and when there is a call to action, from a timid anticipation of difficulty. After all, it is very few of us who keep up the due balance between thought and action. There is (we may so far modify the words of this book) a time to think and a time to act, but few reflect just up to the moment of action, and then strike instantly and to the purpose. Shakespeare finely described a state of mind to which many are tempted, when he said that "the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." It is a happy thing for us that in this world we are called to act, and not to speculate; but it is a most unhappy thing if that call finds us dreamy

and procrastinating. Reflection overbalances action. The habit grows upon us of staring up into the sky, to note the changes of the wind, until the sowing time is passed; of admiring the forms and colours of the clouds, instead of going forth to reap the harvest.

It has sometimes occurred to me that thought and action, speculation and practice, are related to each other as melody and time in music. Beautiful sounds may by accident fall into beautiful combinations, and the breathings of an Æolian harp have a charm of their own; but until the element of time be added it is not music. Even so the unpractical speculator may have fine thoughts and fascinating experiences; his mental exercises may be as sweet as the notes of an Æolian harp; but they are as wild and meaningless. *Time* it is that makes music, and even so the music of life is beaten out by action as well as thought. There can be no order or loveliness in a life where these are not combined, where beautiful thinkings and exquisite feelings are not brought into meaning and symmetry by the time marked for us by the still recurring voice of duty.

This, my brethren, is certainly of the very utmost

importance in an age of speculation and boundless inquiry. It is quite idle to attempt to prevent men from speculating and inquiring. It is hopeless to attempt to put back the nineteenth century to the intellectual point of the tenth. It is worse than idle; it is presumptuous, even impious. But remember that speculation and inquiry are safe and healthy, as far, and only as far, as they are conducted in *connection* with action. There need be no fear of courageous and unflinching investigation, if it go hand in hand with devotion to duty, and obedience to the light within, and work for others. "Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." "Trust in the Lord;" there is thought and feeling. "Do good;" there is the response to duty and the practice of it. "If any man will do My will," or "is willing to do My will" (*i.e.* as far as he knows it), "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." Speculation becomes perilous when dissevered from action, not because speculation is wicked, but because the balance is not preserved which is essential to mental health, and to the acquisition of truth. We must, to use a forcible Scripture phrase, "*do* the truth," as well as think the truth,

if we are to *be* true. Much of the mental embarrassment of persons well disposed on the whole is due to this. Not, indeed, all. It is a cruel thing to say that no one can have doubts unless he be unfaithful to conscience. It is as false as it is cruel. But remember this; if you speculate until the moment for action is past, you are laying up difficulties for yourself. Work and duty are the natural correctives of unwholesome and unlicensed speculation.

And this, in point of fact, furnishes the explanation of the perplexities of not a few. There are too many; in frankness it must be added, women especially; who either have no definite business in life, or do not know where to find it. It is a marvel indeed if, their minds being thrown in upon themselves, the reflective and speculative portion of their nature, and in most cases the emotional part also, do not acquire an enormous ascendency; but it is no marvel whatever if, in such case, they are carried hither and thither by speculative difficulties. Dreaming is a dangerous thing in this working and struggling world under *any* circumstances, most dangerous of all when it is indulged in to the neglect of duty, and when it is but a form of criminal idleness.

But I must try to bring these thoughts to a point, and so I shall warn you against this purposeless disposition, (1) in the greatest matter of all, our closing with the offers of God's love, and the surrender of ourselves to His service. You will neither sow nor reap if you allow yourselves to be daunted by the supposed difficulties of a religious life. Now, I have no desire to soften down those difficulties. I shall not try to make apologies for the Gospel, because it merely tells us that "it must needs be that offences come." It is quite enough to point out that difficulty is just as much, but no more, an element in the winning an incorruptible crown than in winning anything whatever which is worth the possessing. The constitution of God's government, under which we live, is, that nothing good comes to us save through difficulty. To wish it otherwise is merely to wish that we had been born in a world different from the one in which, as a matter of fact, we find ourselves. We cannot hope to have the highest blessing of all on terms upon which *no* blessing is attainable. What we may hope for is that with difficulty will come also ample recompense. The gloriousness of the prize will make the toil of winning it

seem light. An enthusiasm, wrought by the Spirit of God, will bear us along; we shall count the hindrances along the road but trifling, because heaven and victory and Christ are at the end. Believe it, my brethren. Accept God's salvation, and leave the future to Him. Start upon the way that leadeth to life, and trust Him that "as your day so will your strength be."

But guard against this wavering and procrastinating temper, (2) in fulfilling the details of duty, and in the conduct of life. After all, life should be an economy; an economy of strength, of time, of opportunity. We set out with a certain allowance of these,—our five talents, our three talents, our one talent, as the case may be; and the great aim of life should be to "use up," so to speak, all our strength and time and opportunity; to have as little *waste* as possible in carrying out the purposes of life. But it is quite certain that in most lives there is very grievous waste. And there is waste, mainly because men will observe the wind when they should sow, and watch the clouds when they should be reaping. The moment for doing a good deed, *i.e.* the *best* moment for doing it, passes away while we are thinking whether we shall do it. And then we

have to attempt it at a disadvantage, when our mental or bodily strength is less. We would not rise for our journey when the morning was cool and the air fresh, and so we have to plod on, heated and footsore, under the noon-day sun.

You remember the often-repeated story of the Sibyl, who offered to the rulers of Rome nine precious volumes relating to the destinies of their country, at a price which they refused to give; how she returned after a time with six, asking the same price, and being again dismissed; and how, at last, she returned with three, for which, in their hour of perplexity and distress, they were obliged to give exactly the same sum as would have secured the whole nine. Alas, brethren, the lives of most of us are but the refusal to buy the Sibylline books, until in bitterness we learn that it is worth our while to give at last for the three what would have gained for us all the nine. "Too late! too late!" is the mournful epitaph on departed hopes and vanished opportunities.

But we must watch against this wavering and procrastinating temper, (3) and lastly, in our work for others. I do from my heart wish that in our efforts for the souls and bodies of men we would

bear in mind two very elementary considerations. First, that it is better to work with the tools we have than to spend our time in lamenting that they are not better; and next, that it is not permitted to us to dictate to God what amount of success shall follow our efforts, that our right state of mind is rather to be thankful that we have any success whatever. Besides watching the clouds and the wind there is another habit of ours, which we generally suppose to be characteristic of children, and that is, pulling up the plants to see whether they are growing. All this it is which leaves upon our religious, philanthropic, educational movements, the impress of "vanity and vexation of spirit."

The history of the Church of England for the last hundred and fifty years is but the story of the Sibylline books repeated. She lost her opportunity with the masses of the people of this country; she saw them, through neglect and selfishness, drifting into godlessness and lawlessness. She spent her time in thinking how the work ought to be done, instead of *doing* it. She was watching the movements of the clouds, and the change of the wind, when she should have been breaking up her fallow ground, and sowing in righteousness, or when the

fields were "white already to the harvest." I am no prophet, and I dare say that for our Church there is an honourable and a useful future, for which she will be prepared in ways we know not. But that she can ever regain the vantage-ground she has had in the past, with its splendid opportunities, is about as unsubstantial a dream as ever crossed the mind of an enthusiast. She may buy the *three* Sibylline books; she is, I trust, actually buying them; but she will never secure the *nine*.

Yet, why should I speak only of our own Church? Is it not a heavy charge against all professing Christendom that, observing the wind, it has not sown, and regarding the clouds, it has not reaped? So much time is spent in surveying and trying to amend the machinery, that the work is not done. Multitudes are perishing for lack of knowledge.

We have not, we think, had much success in our efforts for others. Success! I think we have had much more than we deserved. When I read the history of the Church, or of the Sects, I cannot but wonder we have any religion left. When I recollect the selfishness, and stupidity, and class

distrust of *all* classes, I marvel that we are at this day a civilized, an orderly, a prosperous people. To us belongs confusion of face; to God be all the praise. It is of His grace that we are not consumed. To that grace be all the glory!

VIII.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF FAITH AND REASON.

ST. JOHN xx. 29.

"Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."

AMONGST words grievously misemployed, the word "faith" stands conspicuous. It is grossly and cruelly ill-treated. Round it a perfect host of misconceptions cluster themselves. And as to-day we are invited to consider the want of faith, or, more accurately, the slowness of faith, of St. Thomas, I shall offer to you, in connection with the words before us, some thoughts which I feel to be important, though I am profoundly conscious that upon such a subject I may very possibly fail to convey to you with precision what is present to my own mind.

And first of all, I venture to observe that from men of intellect, "faith" has too often received very

hard measure. We are told again and again that the days of "faith" are over; that men of the nineteenth century walk by reason, not by faith; that "verification" has now taken the place of submission to authority; that men are no longer to believe, but to prove. Here, as usual, unbelief and superstition play into each other's hands, for we find the Church of Rome assuring us that mediæval times, when the human mind was deeply degraded, were yet the "ages of faith;" that this is a day of rampant unbelief. Of course, the grand point here is what we mean by "faith," but, speaking generally, I would venture categorically to deny every single portion of this statement. I take leave to maintain, on the other hand, the following propositions. Reason, neither in Scripture nor in fact, is the opposite of "faith;" on the contrary, reason cannot exist apart from faith, and faith is impossible apart from reason. Verification is not incompatible, but entirely consistent, with faith, provided you take verification in any truly scientific sense. Submission to authority, if by that you mean submission merely to an *outward* authority, is so far from being the same thing as faith, that it is decidedly opposed to the conception of faith as set forth in

Scripture, and in point of fact is not the ground of heartfelt belief in any real Christian. But submission to authority in another sense is recognised, and acted upon, by scientific men quite as truly as by Christians. There is, in truth, no opposition whatever between believing and proving. We believe at the proper time, and we prove at the proper time, but it is simply untrue that the scientific man *only* proves and the Christian *only* believes. It may be affirmed, on the contrary, that the Christian is bound to prove, and that the scientific man cannot help exercising belief. And, finally, I altogether deny that the middle ages were distinctively "ages of faith" in any Christian and worthy sense of the phrase. Rather were they ages of credulity, and credulity in the New Testament is condemned on the very ground that it is directly opposed to faith, in any high and evangelic sense of that word. And I am not sure that there is not quite as much, if not more, real faith in the world in this inquiring nineteenth century, as in those days, when strength of faith for the most part meant imbecility of understanding.

These positions it would of course be impossible

for me now to establish. All I ask you to believe is that the smart and shallow practice of playing off faith against reason springs out of no true philosophy. It is not, after all, quite so easy a matter to exterminate faith, as a power in the world. You might just as well try to abolish gravitation or electricity. Why do I affirm this? Because, if faith means the trusting to conclusions which nevertheless we cannot "verify" with the logical faculty, then faith is a necessary condition of *all* human knowledge. I cannot deal with the metaphysical question here; but this I may observe, that all knowledge is based upon certain assumptions, which are yet absolutely incapable of *logical* proof. We believe them. We cannot help believing them. If we tried to think without assuming them, our thinkings would become absolutely chaotic. All metaphysicians confess this. Some may indeed reduce these assumptions to a very few, but all agree that there are certain elementary conceptions as certain to us as anything can be, which we accept but cannot prove. As long as they exist, the principle of faith must be recognised, and if the world were to go round for ever and ever, men with men's minds would continue to exercise faith, in a

greater or less degree. Would that men of intellect would abate their unreasoning aversion to the word "faith," and all that it exactly represents! I know well how much may be said in extenuation; what insolent and preposterous demands have been made in the name of religion; how the claim to accept revolting and incredible fables, under the pretext of "faith," becomes, even to gentle and trustful spirits, so unendurable, that at last they revolt against their teachers with scorn, learn to detest the very word "faith" as standing for every conceivable superstition, and break away, alas, from the *true* in their attempt to extricate themselves from the *false*.

If you would assure yourself of the truth of my position that unbelief begets credulity, and credulity in turn leads to unbelief, I would ask you to consider what are the two most strongly marked currents of thought in England at the present moment. Ritualism, and Positivism! First, the demand of a portion of the clergy that the laity shall subjugate their intellects to what they call the "Church," which invariably means, if only you trace it far enough back, to the clergy themselves; the demand that thinking and reading men shall

accept such portentous dogmas as that a Bishop, by the mere imposition of his hands, works the most tremendous miracle which can be conceived, far more tremendous indeed than any recorded in either Testament; a miracle no less astounding than this, that the ordained man, be he ignorant, or be he vicious, can not only declare, but "convey," forgiveness to the sinner, and cause to be present in the bread and wine of the Holy Communion the body and blood, the *natural* body and the *natural* blood, of the blessed Saviour; insomuch that when the consecrated elements are on the Lord's Table, even though the church be locked and empty, no single person being present to perform an act of faith, Christ, the *man* Christ, is there just as literally as He was in Jerusalem, when Thomas put his fingers into the print of the nails and touched His side. And these main dogmas necessarily carry with them such a host of others that it is no wonder if the poor bewildered soul, thus cruelly overtaxed, finds no escape save in the resolve to believe *nothing*, to go forth into the blackness of nonbelief, and "stumble upon the dark mountains," rather than rush wildly after meteor-lights which shine only to mislead.

Yes, and terrible though *that* be, is it half so ignoble as the attempt to trample down the reason which God has given us, the crown and glory of our manhood, or (what amounts to the same thing) commit it to the safe keeping of some clerical guide, who will "keep" it only too safely, and exempt us from the trouble of honest inquiry and patient seeking after truth? So far am I from being surprised that superstition and nescience, credulity and unbelief, are found side by side, that I would be greatly surprised were it otherwise. They are, in fact, cause and effect. It is not by any means the first time that fanaticism and infidelity have worked together to one destructive result. And unless I am very greatly mistaken, we are doomed to witness the growth of a yet more virulent fanaticism, side by side with a more deplorable and widespread scepticism. The one hope for true religion lies in a determined resolve, on the part of good men, not to allow the claims either of reason or faith to be trampled under foot; to assert the sacredness of belief against those who would rob us of our foothold in this uncertain world, and the sacredness of reason against those who would consign us to unceasing and inhuman intellectual bondage.

But, turning to the lesson we derive from our Lord's declaration respecting the faith of St. Thomas, we can easily see how it may be perverted to justify that unwarrantable notion of faith which represents it as the acceptance of dogmas without evidence. A caviller may rejoin, "you see that the majority of the disciples accepted the fact of the resurrection without proof, and Christ commended them in the words, 'blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed;' but when St. Thomas insisted on proof, Christ blamed him; therefore it is wrong to ask for proof, and blessed to believe without it." This is plausible, but entirely inaccurate. Both portions of the statement happen to be incorrect. First, it is not true that the disciples believed without proof. The whole narrative goes to show that after the resurrection they were in anything but a believing mood. The very joy of thinking that their Master might have risen made them slower to believe that He had risen. They were most certainly not in the frame of mind of men eager to accept a conclusion because it would have been pleasant to accept it. "They (we are significantly told) believed not for joy." And, as a matter of fact, they all had precisely the evidence

vouchsafed to St. Thomas, for we are told that to them *also* Christ showed His hands and His side.

And then, it is not true that Christ blamed St. Thomas. The very point of the lesson conveyed is that He did *not* blame him. He said that there was a better kind of faith than his, the faith of those who believe and see not; but He did not say that Thomas had no faith, or that his faith was not acceptable to God. It is indeed plain that the gracious Saviour, allowing (as He ever does) for diversities of mind, recognised St. Thomas's requirement as not wrong for *him;* certainly did not regard it as wicked that he should make it; but, seeing that the honest and good heart was there, just as really as in the others, granted him, what he asked, accompanying, however, the concession with the intimation that it would have been more blessed to have believed without seeing. Not, observe, to have believed without *proof*, but to have believed without the particular *kind* of proof for which St. Thomas called. The rest of the disciples did not, I repeat, believe without proof. They did *not* accept the resurrection as an unreasoning Romanist accepts the miracles of Lourdes or La Salette. In the whole of our Lord's past

life and teaching lay the proof that the grave could not detain Him. A being who had lived as He lived, and taught as He taught; why, nothing was more natural and probable, following indeed as a rational consequence, than that He should rise from the dead. Of course, the feeling that He might be expected to rise was no infallible evidence that He had arisen, but when adequate outward proof was offered, the whole of the past fell into its proper place as evidence. They recollected all that had forced upon them the conviction that this was indeed the Son of God, and now, when they saw the Saviour again before their eyes, faith received the evidence for which it was prepared, and brought them to His feet in joy and adoration.

It is, then, altogether incorrect to suppose that Thomas represents those who must have proof of what they hold, while the other apostles represent those who believe without proof. St. Thomas stands for those who can take in only *one* kind of evidence, viz., that which has to do with the logical faculty, and despise every consideration which does not appeal to the intellect. St. Thomas is the counterpart of those who *seem* at least to be cold,

passionless, and remorselessly argumentative, the men who must have everything put into a syllogism, who think that analysis is the be-all and end-all of human existence. Now, I say that the mere fact of our Lord's granting St. Thomas's request should prevent us from being ungrateful and untender to such men. If it had been wicked to make such a request Christ would not have complied with it. The world may well be thankful for its Thomases. There is such a mighty mass of stolid stupidity, even where there is no criminal aversion to truth, that we may well pronounce blessings on the men who compel us to think, even if they shake us somewhat roughly out of our intellectual slumbers. They are standing at this moment between us and a powerful conspiracy against manly thought and rational progress.

But the mass of men never can be Thomases. And (what is more) they ought not if they could. The logical faculty *alone* can never be the guide of life. There is a whole world of evidence which must, and ought to, determine action, which yet cannot be logically stated. In other words, man has a conscience and a heart, as well as an intellect. These must not act independently of the under-

standing, but neither must the understanding thwart their free exercise. Christ, who spoke so gently to St. Thomas, frowns not on the inquirer. The true spirit of His religion is essentially an inquiring spirit. But there is something better than inquiry; truth possessed, loved, as nature loves the sunshine; truth (above all) *lived out*, and tested by its effect upon the life. Oh, believe it! Moral truth rests upon something in addition to intellectual proof. Let me say this to the inquirer, "You will not get at moral truth, truth dealing, that is, with right and wrong, God and sin, love and hatred, merely by logic. Where *such* truth is concerned, you must believe before you can see." That is the meaning of our Lord's words to St. Thomas. I do not forget the truth involved in the oft-quoted lines—

> "There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds."

Yes, brethren, *honest* doubt; so taught the blessed Son of God Himself; but not the doubt which glories in its doubtfulness; not the doubt which is dishonest, because, rebelling against the sense of holy obligation, it would free itself from the claims of high duty and purity and steadfast continuance in

well-doing. Blessed are they who believe, even where they cannot see, that is, where *logic* is impossible or practically unavailable. Blessed are they who, like Thomas, fight their way to faith by manly devotion to truth, even if in nature they seem a little cold and exacting; but woe, woe to those who have the light and walk not in it, who love not truth and goodness, though they maintain, for respectability's sake, an outward conformity to the proprieties of religion! For them it were a righteous thing if Christ allowed them to fall into blankest and most dismal untruth. It is terrible to have the light of the Sun of Righteousness bathing the world without, and yet to have within a heart dark as night, or with its chambers of imagery lit up by the lurid light of evil passion. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them." "While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of the light." They who love the darkness shall be cast into the outer darkness. God is Light. Heaven will be light. It is by loving and living in the light here, that we shall be "partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light."

IX.

THE DIVINE AND THE PHYSICIAN.

COLOSSIANS iv. 14.

"Luke, the beloved physician."

IN commemorating, as we do to day, the life and work of St. Luke, we are bound to distinguish what is fairly deducible from Holy Scripture respecting him from such data as tradition supplies. In my text, in the Epistle to Philemon, and in the Second Epistle to Timothy, we find mention of a Luke or Lucas, and the supposition seems a very fair one that all the three passages point to one individual. He was a physician; he was with St. Paul during his first imprisonment; and if it is to be supposed that the Second Epistle to Timothy was written during a second imprisonment, then he continued faithful to the Apostle to the end of his days. From his not being mentioned in this chapter along with

"those of the circumcision," it seems probable that he was a Gentile. This, I think, exhausts the information supplied by the New Testament.

Tradition adds the following statements, which of course must be tested by the usual criteria which distinguish true from false traditions. According to Eusebius he was born in Antioch, but his statement is a little discredited by his committing the blunder of identifying him with Lucius of Antioch, mentioned in the Acts, though Lucas and Lucius are entirely different names. He is stated by somewhat early writers to have been one of the "seventy;" and the Gospel for this day shows that the compilers of our Prayer Book favoured that opinion. It scarcely seems consistent, however, with the assumption that he was a Gentile; and it is certainly hard to reconcile it with the statement in the 1st of St. Luke, that his knowledge of Christ's life was derived from those who were "eye witnesses;" which seems unquestionably to imply that he was *not* an eye-witness himself. The belief that he wrote the Acts, and consequently the "former treatise" referred to in the opening of the Acts, and that the treatise was the Gospel of St. Luke, we derive, not from Scripture, but from tradition. From a like source

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we have the statement that he reached the Gospel, after St. Paul's death, in Dalmatia and Gallia. It is asserted that he died a martyr, but this must be taken with reserve, because there was a disposition in early times to assume that every well-known personage in the Christian Church must of necessity have met with a martyr's death. It is affirmed, further, that he died between the years 75. and 100. after Christ.

The one fact, however,—and indeed that best ascertained about St. Luke,—to which I would especially call your attention, is that he was a physician. In many sermons which are being preached to-day, it will, no doubt, be pointed out that from being a physician of the body he became a physician of the soul; and the function of God's ministers will be largely set forth under this figure. It may be instructive then to inquire how far the work of the minister of Christ is akin to that of the physician, and in what respects the analogy may be pushed too far. It is to be observed, however, that Christ's ministers are not spoken of as spiritual physicians, in the New Testament. And this is a remarkable circumstance, when we consider how very obvious the analogy is, though possibly to be accounted for on

the supposition that the Jews may not have had an exalted conception of the physician's office.

Still, notwithstanding the silence of the New Testament, it is evident that the two vocations have something in common. That common element is that it belongs to both to war with evil. Their enemies are not two, but one. Evil in regard to the body, which we term disease; evil in regard to the soul, which we call sin. Why should not those who war against one foe reverence each other's office? Shall we ever fight lawfully till we fight side by side? Every clergyman of sense knows how powerless he is in the presence of the disorganisation which dulls the reason, or creates such nervous irritability as makes it mere cruelty to ply the sufferer with his exhortations. He does not mistake hysteria for piety. He does not think that God is hiding His face in anger, because the poor patient is borne down by physical debility. He does not think death-bed raptures an infallible evidence of conversion. He knows that under certain physical conditions the best and holiest must walk in darkness. And does the physician also never feel himself powerless? Is he not baffled by that strange thing called mind? He exerts, let us confess, a

wonderful control over it; but does he not constantly reach the limits of his control? Is he not confronted and thwarted by influences which treatment cannot reach? Envy, remorse, anxiety, grief,—here are agencies, not at all of a material kind. which often make recovery impossible.

The functions, then, of the divine and the physician are but departments of one great work. This truth is, doubtless, presented to us in the record of our Lord's miracles. It was needful that the healer of souls should be also the healer of bodies. So that the connection between the two functions is at once recognised by true religion, and enforced by science. In the middle ages, physicians were deeply distrusted by the clergy as atheistic. Some, doubtless, were so. Some, probably, because they were distrusted and denounced, learned to look upon the clergy as their natural enemies; even as, in the present day, the indiscriminate and unreasoning accusation of infidelity has had its effect, more or less, in making scientific men really what they are accused of being. To tell a man that he is an atheist, is a ready way of making him one. True Christianity should teach men that the physicians of the body and the physicians of the

soul are engaged in one holy work, in the one great warfare of our existence here against the mysterious thing we call evil.

Another point they have in common to which I would advert. If they do their work thoroughly, they are not satisfied to deal with symptoms. The physician looks beneath symptoms. He understands that it is the constitution that is wrong. He addresses himself to the restoration of that. And is it not the mark of a true Christianity that it too is not satisfied to correct a symptom here, or a symptom there; that it looks on the disease of sin as being in the system; that it maintains that man is not to become spiritually healthy by little superficial ameliorations, by making light of the sinfulness of sin, but by seeking a great change in the spiritual constitution, in will, and conscience, and heart, *i.e.*, in the *man* himself?

Many lessons, indeed, the physicians of souls may learn from the physicians of the body. One only I can now point out. We are often tempted, in the presence of moral evil, to doubt whether our efforts are of any use. There will always be vice, and ignorance, and sin, so we may as well, we think, fold our arms, and submit to the dire necessity,

and let things take their course. But the physician never reasons thus. Brought hourly face to face with disease and death, he never capitulates to them. He never accepts them as part of the order of the Universe, but treats them as abnormal and disorderly. Men sicken and die; but he goes on cheerfully, hopefully, checking sickness, saving lives, as God gives him the opportunity. To attempt at once to relieve has become to him a second nature; would that the same hopeful, cheery, prompt, and practical habit of mind belonged to our spiritual physicians; that they spent less time in repeating their medical formulas, and polishing up their surgical instruments, and would hurry forward to save those who are ready to perish!

We must not dwell longer on those points which the physician and the minister of Christ have in common, but go on to observe that the analogy is not to be pushed too far. There are very vital points of difference. I do not, *e.g.*, by calling a clergyman a physician of the soul, commit myself to implicit acceptance of his teaching. Even if there were a strict analogy between his office and that of the physician, I would not be bound to this, for such implicit acceptance we do not accord

to the physician. Indeed our relation to him well illustrates the truth so apt to be forgotten, that there is no necessary opposition between faith and reason, between authority and private judgment. I use my reason, and exercise my private judgment, in selecting my medical adviser. And so, if the analogy hold good, I should, as in point of fact even the Roman Catholic if intelligent does, use my private judgment in the selection of my spiritual adviser.

Yes, it may be rejoined, but having selected him, you must put implicit confidence in his skill. I reply, certainly not, if the analogy be complete between the office of the spiritual and the temporal physician. No man puts "absolute and implicit" confidence in his physician. He trusts him; he recognises his authority; he yields to him as a skilled man up to a certain point, but if he becomes aware that he is ignorant or careless or plainly embarrassed by his case, or if there be even a suspicion of this, he reverts to his private judgment, and prefers to run the risk of choosing another physician rather than to incur the greater risk of leaving his life in the hands of an incompetent adviser. Persons who contend for obedience to the

clergy sometimes say, "you trust your doctor or your solicitor, why not trust your clergyman?" I answer that you do *not* trust them with the same kind of absolute and implicit trust which is claimed for the clergy, or for the "Church," which merely means the clergy in the aggregate or a section of them. And this is obvious, even supposing that the office of the pastor is strictly similar to that of the doctor. But it is not so. He is, no doubt, or he ought to be, an expert, a skilled man, able to afford professional direction to those who seek it, and qualified to expound Christianity to mankind.

But the analogy is far from complete. In the first place men do not need to go to a theological expert to cure their souls in the same way as they need to go to a medical expert to cure their bodies; because the cure of the soul does not depend to the same extent upon knowledge as it does upon the state of the heart, so that the wayfaring man, though a fool, if he be honest and true to light, shall not err therein. Again, as a matter of fact, the Bible is in every man's hand, and in this country the right of every man to judge is more or less admitted by all; and this of course

takes the matter, more or less, out of the hands of experts. Again, as a matter of fact also, there are many laymen who have a very thorough knowledge of theology, while there are clergymen who have next to none. It is rare, indeed, to find one who is not a doctor having a profound knowledge of medicine, but it is by no means rare to find laymen possessing very high theological attainments. Selden in his "Table Talk" it is (I think), who remarks that he generally found the most difficult passages of Scripture best explained by laymen.

Again (and this is the most important consideration of all), the great gift, upon the possession of which our salvation depends, the Holy Spirit of God, is a gift to all, to be obtained in answer to prayer by all, and if honestly used, capable of leading all to God and holiness and heaven. Then again, and lastly, the high ecclesiastical theory does not proceed upon the fact of a clergyman's being an expert, but upon the circumstance that, through the laying on of hands, he belongs to a peculiar caste. I wish devoutly that we were experts more generally than we are, for I believe that, though the laity will never resort to the clergy for knowledge merely because a bishop's hands have rested

upon them, they will look to them for information and for guidance also, if they have reason to believe that they know what they profess to teach, and will not warp facts in the interests of some religious party. I speak thus not to depreciate but to magnify my own office. It is rather that I have such an exalted conception of what the ministry of the Church might be, of its unspeakable value in the nineteenth century as well as in the first, that I can no more rest the claims of a clergyman upon the fact that he has been episcopally ordained, than I can trust a doctor merely because he possesses a diploma; even as in my hour of sickness I would think little of all the diplomas in the world, if my own observation told me that a physician was wanting in knowledge, sagacity, and presence of mind.

Lord Coleridge, in a singularly outspoken speech, has lately observed that the clergy must aim, not at power but at *influence*. I think that is profoundly true, but it seems no less certain that while they may secure "power" more or less by pressing extravagant ecclesiastical pretensions, they can secure "influence" only by precisely the same means as men of other professions, viz., by com-

petence to do what they profess to do, to lead men to the knowledge of God in Christ. "Who is sufficient for these things?" With such an ideal before us, must we not be humbled in the dust? Shall we not indeed be overwhelmed unless we recur to the thought that, after all, our function is to lead men from ourselves to the great Physician, whose healing power we need as really as the perishing human creatures around us?

Hence is derived the true influence of the minister of God. The whole head of humanity is sick, the whole heart is faint. We must not, I repeat, allow the notion that sin is a mere passing indisposition, when we know in our hearts that it has reached down to our very inmost nature. We must not heal slightly the wound of the daughter of our people, crying peace, peace, when there is no peace. There is only one force mightier than sin, and that force is Christ. It is Christ whom the world needs, and whom we are commissioned to proclaim to the world. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" The confidence that there *is* a balm and a physician can alone give us assurance that

we are ourselves true physicians of the soul, or enable us, discarding figurative words, to say to mankind in freedom and truth, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

X.

THE DAYS OF OLD.

PSALM xliv. 1.

"We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old."

A FRIVOLOUS and shallow person once inquired of an old Carthusian monk how he had contrived to get through his life. He replied in the words of another psalm, "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times." That man had found one great secret of hope, and cheerfulness, and moral strength. It is unquestionably an immense gain to be able to get beyond our own little life and the little circle which is round it, and to allow our thoughts and sympathies to work in the wider and freer region of the world's past and present and future.

And here we must confess the immense value of right education. I do not say that mental culture will necessarily make us more cheerful in our thoughts

about our race and about ourselves, but I am sure that the absence of it robs us of a boundless source of pleasure, a spring of real hope, because we are then thrown in upon self; our immediate comforts and discomforts assume an altogether exaggerated importance; and when lower satisfactions are withdrawn, nothing is left us but incurable satiety and unrest. Anything that lifts us out of the present is invaluable. To extend our horizon, which must be the result of education, is an incalculable good.

> "Blessings be with them, and eternal praise,
> Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares,"

the poets, the historians, the wise thinkers, who have rescued us from narrow and sordid views of life, and helped us to "consider the days of old and the years of ancient times," so that the littlenesses and frets of our own poor life were forgotten because we became, through their guidance, the heirs of all the ages.

Is it not profoundly melancholy, in this world whose history is of such solemn, and indeed painful, interest, to listen to the thing called "conversation" by vast numbers? Its staple is the sayings and doings of just the few people immediately around them, and these not discussed in any intelligent or acute way, but after the feeblest and flimsiest fashion.

You would suppose that when persons devote all their thoughts to the affairs of their immediate neighbours they will at least discuss them with astuteness and insight. But this is just what you do not find. For, my brethren, if we care to know nothing but what our neighbours may be saying and doing, we do not know even *that* properly. I am not asking anything so unreasonable or (I may add) so undesirable as that we should never speak about our neighbours. If we are to take an interest in them, as we ought to do, I suppose we cannot help speaking of them. And if our thoughts and studies tend to make us indifferent to their well being, still worse, to think contemptuously of them, they cannot be conducted in a right spirit. But it is the man who is able to look beyond his own little circle who takes large and thoughtful views of human life; it is he who, in a wise and kind way, interests himself in those within his own circle, acting all the more neighbourly because he has had a larger experience; neither yielding to miserable gossip on the one hand nor unsympathising exclusiveness on the other. But, after all, the great difficulty is this, that education has done so little for vast numbers that if they do not converse about their neighbours, they

cannot converse at all. They are simply without topics. It is pre-eminently the result of mental training that we have the power to get away from our own concerns and surroundings, to feel ourselves one with all mankind, to know that they and we are moving forward to the fulfilment of a glorious hope.

Here, however, it is that the influence of religion enters in. Education, even apart from religion, because it enables us to take a comprehensive view of the world's history, enables us also to see in that history a regular method and an advance to something better and happier. The belief in "a good time coming" is surely justified by history. If, indeed, it be the record of mere wild confusion, of hopeless anarchy, of chaotic strife, destitute of any order or purpose, undoubtedly the best thing we can do is to shut up our books for ever, and devote the rest of our lives to petty personal talk. Those dismal views of life which are the product of the newest philosophy, and which, if they were widely accepted would crowd our lunatic asylums with the noblest and best of mankind, convert history from the record of a Divine order, working itself out even through disorder, into a horrible imbroglio, without purpose

and without end, of suffering, and folly, and cruelty. That it is nothing of the kind, we may, thank God, know and feel. But we know it most assuredly, and feel it most deeply, when we read history in the light of God. History reveals an order; religion leads us to the source and centre of that order. Take away the thought of order and of God, and there is no such thing as history. The story of the race is a mere wild demon-dance, the record of which we must try to forget. We are in short brought round to the highly enlightened and ennobling summary of faith and practice, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But this is precisely the conclusion which good men in all ages have refused to admit. In our worst moments it has its fascination. When conscience is clearest in its utterance, when reverence for duty is deepest, when our feelings are tenderest and most unselfish, we resist and hate it. When we look upon the past of our race, we see much that fills us with shame and anger and dread, but at all events we see advance and order. The Psalmist, even in darker and more perplexing days could see this. Much more may we, "upon whom the ends of the world are come," take up the inspiriting and thankful strain, "we have heard with our ears, O

God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old."

There is an old and wise proverb that "children and fools should never see half-finished works," and of course in regard to God's vast government we are all childish and foolish. As to His moral government we have to remember that "the greater cannot be comprehended of the less"; although this does not mean that we know nothing about it whatsoever. "We know in part," but we *do* know a part. If we look on a half-finished picture, we know, at all events, *something* about the picture that is to be. If we find a human head in marble, we know that the trunk was not the trunk of an animal. Our ignorance is not absolute, and when religionists tell us of some dreadful and cruel things that God is to do in the future, it is an entirely fair and sufficient reply that He who was good and gracious in the past cannot be otherwise than good and gracious in the future.

Still the world is a half-finished work, and therefore we must be prepared to find much there which, from the very conditions of the case, is inexplicable. Now if this be so, if the historian even of widest reach of vision sees only a half-finished work, how utterly misleading and false our thoughts about the

world must be if we refuse to "consider the days of old, and the years of ancient times." Here, we may add, is a powerful consideration in favour of Bible reading as an element in education. I am thinking now simply of its intellectual effect. Reading and writing and arithmetic, essential as they are, have no tendency to enlarge the mind, or to widen the mental horizon. But put the Bible into the hands of a child, and at once that child becomes aware of the fact that its little world is but a corner of the great wide world, that its little existence is but a segment of the life of the race. And at once an idea is set before it under an immense variety of aspects which inevitably expands its mind, and by doing this achieves one of the greatest aims of education. It may take in together with that idea much that is crude and unworthy of God; much that is not really the teaching of the Bible, but thrust into it by man's foolishness. Still the end is gained. The child learns that it is in a very large world, a member of the great human family; it is taught to look back to a past in which God has been wise and good, to look forward to a future in which that wisdom and goodness will be more perfectly justified and unfolded.

But now, my brethren, this habit of considering

"the days of old and the years of ancient times" will have two happy results; it will teach humility, and it will calm down anxiety. While we thank God for the light He has vouchsafed in these last days, while we will not lend an ear to the suggestion that knowledge, progress, science, civilization are bad things, we must also disallow the monstrous notion that there was no wisdom in the world until the nineteenth century. There is no sense in proclaiming that "we are the people, and wisdom will die with us." We may even be led to suspect that while we possibly in present times have amongst us a larger number of merely clever men, and while further the average of culture may be higher than it has been hitherto, yet the comparison of our own with former ages may often lead us to exclaim, "There were giants in the earth in those days."

And as we thus learn modesty, so may we, by considering "the days of old and the years of ancient times" be delivered from unreasoning panic and unbelieving timidity. There is not a clever sceptical book which issues from the press, nor a brilliant disquisition on philosophy, which is not the signal for unmeasured bewilderment and wildest shrieking. Let us seriously ask ourselves whether

it is likely that if men had felt in their power and reality the great convictions of religion, if Christianity had at any *one* moment of their existence been, not a creed, not a sentiment, but their very life of life, won through conflict, proved through suffering to be the "one thing needful;" whether if, I say, it had been all this to them in the past, there would have been the shameful and scandalous panic which seems to pass periodically like a wave over the religious world. The worst thing people can do at such an emergency is to shriek. If the church is on fire, the best thing you can do is to help to put out the fire, but the next best is to keep quiet. One would think, from the attitude of religionists, that men will, at the bidding of a few clever essayists or critics, let go the hold upon spiritual convictions which they have retained for ages. The faith is attacked! And was it never attacked before? Surely the intellectual shock which men experienced at the Reformation was far more violent than any which is felt now. A hundred years ago there was a more wide-spread and pestilent scepticism than any we have to lament; yet religion grappled with it, did not simply stand on the defensive, but attacked, and attacked successfully. The beginning

of our own century was marked by a very noble revolt against desolating and destructive irreligion, a revolt partly due to the Methodist movement outside the Church and the Evangelical movement within it, but quite as much to Cowper and Wordsworth, Coleridge and Scott, and (last not least) Thomas Carlyle; men of whom, one and all, it was the pre-eminent characteristic, that they inspired us with reverence for "the days of old and the years of ancient times."

I may be told that there are elements specially dangerous and alarming in the doubt of the present half-century. It may be so or it may not. But I confess what alarms me is not the dash and brilliancy of the attackers, but the pitiful helplessness of the attacked. But on this I must not allow myself to dwell. Like the old monk, "I consider the days of old and the years of ancient times," and when every Sunday I listen to the words of my text, and remember what God did for our fathers, and in the old time before them, I find strength and confidence to utter the prayer which so encouragingly follows; "O Lord, arise, help us and deliver us, for Thine honour!" That is a bold expression; a challenge, as it were, to our God; but

it is scriptural and justifiable. He has told us that He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." It seems to me that the robust and vigorous trust of these old Psalms cries shame upon us, who live in a brighter and happier day! "Hath God forgotten to be gracious and will He shut up His loving kindness in displeasure?" Let us, with the psalmist, rather say, "It is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High." For the individual as for the community the ultimate trust must be in the character of God, in His faithfulness most of all. We look back upon our past life, and see how goodness and mercy have followed us through it all. If there have been dispensations hard to bear, and trials the aim of which was hidden from us, we see how many, perhaps indeed *most*, of our sorrows have been of our own creating, how persistently we have been setting our foolish, short-sighted wilfulness against a will infinitely loving and wise.

Still God has been good. He is now what He always has been, and He will be what He is. It is in the recollection of the past that we find strength in the present to say: "I am poor and needy, but Thou God carest for me." He who *was* true *is*

true, and will be true for ever. God is not as the friends who meet us one day with a smile and another with a frown. Having loved His own He loves them to the end. What He *has* done is the earnest of what He *will* do, and our warrant for believing, with St. Paul, that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

XI.

THE TRUE "IMITATIO CHRISTI."

1 ST. JOHN ii. 6.

"He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked."

HOW then did Christ walk? We confess it to be the central idea of the Christian life that we are to be like Jesus, and we regard the "imitation of Christ" as another expression for "Christian obedience." But what is it to be like Christ, to imitate Christ? What do such phrases mean upon the lips of men who belong to the nineteenth century? I wish, some may urge, to follow Christ; but how am I to do it?

This is a practical question, and it is also a very urgent question, and for this reason. Scepticism, at the present time, is by no means limited to the facts of Christianity; it extends also to its moral

teaching. Take the Sermon on the Mount as the fullest exposition of the law of Christ. I find then persons maintaining, first, that it delineates a life so much above humanity, that it is impossible that human creatures ever could live out such a life, but that at all events, and secondly, the Christianity of the present day is something totally different from the Christianity of the Sermon on the Mount, insomuch that it is in no way a "following of Christ," but merely "a civilized heathenism." They do not, they add, blame men for not imitating Christ, for that they hold to be next to impossible in the present state of society, but they do blame them for conforming to the usages of society and living exactly as other people live, while at the same time they profess to walk in the footsteps of One whose life was manifestly something quite unlike that of even the best men of the present time.

Now observe that this obliges us to recur to the preliminary question, what is it to follow Christ? It is good that we should face that question. Sceptics are doing us a kindness when they compel us to be real, when they call us to live up to what we profess, or to cease once for all from making

a profession to which every act of our life is a contradiction. And we are bound to admit at the very outset that the contradiction between the law of Christ, as impersonated in Christ Himself, and the life of professing Christians in these days is undeniable, and in every way astounding. I admit, no frank person can deny, that the lives of vast numbers of men who profess and call themselves Christians are awfully and portentously in contradiction to the infinitely pure and lofty standard of His great example. Conscience testifies that our own lives are often terribly at variance with our profession, and that those who desire in a general way to follow their Saviour, fall woefully short of even their own conceptions of the Saviour's human life.

I may however very reasonably ask; if the Christian life, as exemplified in Christ, be so high above humanity, that it is impossible men can ever lead it, where did the conception of that life originate? If it be so much above earth in its purity and spirituality, did it spring from earth? Who *invented* it, if it was an invention? Surely in the very fact of its being so transcendant that it is idle to think that mortal men can attain it, there is an admission

that it could not have been worked out by mortal men. In proportion as you show that it is impossible for men to live such a life you render it more and more improbable that they *imagined* it. To conceive such a thought a man must have been what he conceived. It is easier to believe that a Christ lived than that some one invented such a conception, and while he was so noble and holy as to imagine it, yet passed off his invention upon the world as a reality.

But, waiving this consideration, I may further urge that the failure of professing Christians to reach their ideal is so far from being a difficulty that it is precisely what might have been anticipated, and anticipated (you will observe) from the very perfection of the ideal. Is it not quite certain that in proportion as the example proposed is transcendant and heavenly, just in that proportion is it impossible to reach it? What do these objectors want? Would they have us to level down the standard of righteousness to the point at which it would be practicable for average people to reach it? I say that such a course would be fatal to the interests of righteousness. Men improve only by aspiring. The moment they reach a point at

which they are satisfied with themselves, they not only cease to go forward, but immediately begin to retrograde. Thank God, the gospel presents no lower standard than this; "be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect." Grant that this standard is unattainable. Not only grant its unapproached elevation, but glory in it, for it is the only standard in aspiring to which men will rise to the highest practical level of goodness and purity. We cannot indeed reach it; in other words man cannot attain infinite perfection; but we can approximate to it, and it is in approximating to it that very commonplace men have been raised to the level of saints and heroes. It need not disquiet us to find men objecting that the gospel proposes a standard which is impracticable; it should disquiet us far more if it were practicable, for we might then begin to suspect that Christianity lowers righteousness to the level of weak and sinful humanity, instead of raising men, by God's grace, to a righteousness more than earthly.

You see, however, that two very practical questions suggest themselves; first, What is it that is meant by following Christ? and secondly, Is it practicable for us in the nineteenth century, and

in our state of society, to follow Him? Attempting to answer these questions, I observe, then, that what the New Testament calls us to, as the imitation of Christ, is the walking in the light of those *principles* which are revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus, the having the "mind" that was in Him, the being led by His *Spirit*. This may seem to you quite an elementary observation, but it is extremely important, inasmuch as the objectors of whom I have spoken assume that there cannot be an imitation of Christ without a kind of aping, if I may be permitted such a word, of the outward circumstances of His earthly life. You will understand better what I mean if I read to you an extract from a book which somewhat lately has attracted attention, and is certainly a strange mixture of truth and extravagance. "Let us ask ourselves candidly what would be the manner of man, the course of action, and what the reception Jesus Christ would meet with if He came among us now, in circumstances parallel to those of His own times. He would be a working man, and He would speak with a provincial accent. He would attack the capitalist, the political economist, the Sabbatarian, and the bench of bishops. He would live

at the East end, among the roughs and gaol-birds, who are our lepers; and He would denounce the luxury and respectability of the West end as He formerly denounced Dives and the Pharisees. He would teach the duty of indiscriminate charity, without inquiring too closely whether this man or his parents had sinned; and the Board of Guardians, the Charity Organisation Society, and the Mendicity people would in turn denounce Him; He would fraternise with the 'enemies of society,' as the discontented poor are called by those well-endowed who fear to lose, and refuse to share with sinners, suspected persons, and all obscure and despised sects. He would be unorthodox in faith, and a reformer in politics; He would lecture in the Hall of Science, and He would be, not crucified nor beheaded, but written down with the whole force of the press."

We ought not to permit the exceeding oddity and exaggeration of this passage to turn us from such amount of truth as it contains. This sort of headlong and sensational writing does, no doubt, very greatly retard and complicate the formation of sober Christian conviction. But what I would point out is this, that it does not in the smallest degree assist you

to ascertain any *principle* upon which the imitation of Christ can be attempted; it makes it consist, in a somewhat childish way, in a literal imitation of the circumstances under which the Saviour lived here below. Because He was, by social position, a poor man, therefore every Christian, though this would be contrary to what we know to have been the fact in Apostolic times, must belong to the working-classes. He must live in the East end of London, though Christ had no settled abode, (for "the Son of Man had not where to lay His head"), and though surely the West end of London just as really needs the presence of those who are Christ-like as the East.

It is quite obvious that this mode of dealing with the Saviour's example might be pushed to lengths which would demonstrate its extreme absurdity. The Redeemer journeyed on foot in the prosecution of His great mission; therefore every Christian is to despise our modern modes of conveyance. Christ knew no wedded life; therefore likeness to Christ involves celibacy. As to the suggestion that the teaching of Christ is opposed to the principles of political economy, or to those admirable associations for organizing charity which have arisen

of late years, it is merely one of those audacious flights of sensationalism which may be met by a simple denial. The very worst enemies of the poor are those who "teach the duty of indiscriminate charity." There never was a more Christ-like work than to put down imposture with a strong hand; and there is no man who more grossly violates the very elementary principles of the kingdom of God than he who will not discriminate; who makes no distinction between the unobtrusive, honest-minded, hard-working poor, the very salt of that portion of society to which they belong, and the besotted, wife-beating, blaspheming wretches who are the disgrace of our civilization and our Christianity.

Christ associated with publicans and sinners. No doubt He did. No doubt the most debased creature on the face of the earth, being still within the reach of God's love, must be dealt with as a human creature, not to be given up as though God had forsaken him, as though Christ had not died for him. But yet Christ it was who laid down the great principle, "to every one that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have;" and though that principle applies primarily to men's spiritual

condition, there can be no question that the Saviour did apply it to the moral state of those with whom He had to do; that He, being perfectly truthful and equitable, did not confound the innocent and long-suffering poor with reprobates; and that if He were amongst us now He would give His gracious approval to all those measures which aim at finding out the good, the upright, the uncorrupted, and refuse to place them under one undiscriminating category with the pests of society.

It is, then, the *principles* unfolded in Christ's life to which we are to conform. A mimicry of His outward life is impossible, and, if it were possible, would be foolish and mischievous. Christ lived apart from the world, in opposition to its maxims, at war with its traditions. Doubtless He did; but what and where is "the world?" Would a man escape from "the world" by renting a lodging at the East end, and associating only with those who work with their hands, or do not work at all? Have the dwellers there no "world" to draw them from God? Have they no maxims and traditions which are inconsistent with the law and life of Christ? It is weary work exposing these wild utterances. But yet the passage just read is found

in a book otherwise of some power, and it represents a mode of dealing with the subject which has attractions for a certain class of minds.

No, brethren; to walk as Christ walked is not to live here or there, not to belong to one class more than another; but to be pure, devout, fearless, self-denying as Jesus was. The man who, beyond all others, stands out in my memory as seeming to have had most of the mind of Christ, as most closely approaching his Master in the possession of that extraordinary influence which a sweet and loving unselfishness carries with it; who, more than any man I ever met with, looked and spoke and acted as if God was in all his thoughts; that man was not an artisan dwelling in a lane in Whitechapel; he was a Church of England clergyman, and a professor in a University, living just as an English gentleman is wont to live, and possessed of noble intellectual endowments, which the world would have appreciated more fully if his modesty, his self-abnegation, had not been as profound as they were. How he loved the poor; how he lived for them, and would have died for them, is best known to those who knew him best; but he did not feel it necessary for their good, or his own following of

Christ to mimic the outward surroundings of the life of that Master before whose least word he bowed in profoundest trust and submission.

To be like Christ is to have the mind of Christ. But, brethren, that is much more difficult than to try to place ourselves in His circumstances. And I implore you not to leave this church with the impression that because you are not called upon to withdraw from your social position, therefore there is no scope for your living a Christian life. Again I say that the contradiction between the life of Christ and the lives of those who call themselves by His name is tremendous and alarming. Let us thank every one who tells us *that*. There *are* multitudes of nominal Christians who never in their lives bowed in simple submission to the word of Him whom they profess to follow. For them to do so will be nothing less than, to themselves, a mighty revolution; to the world, something far more startling than any revolution of which history tells us.

Do not go away with the impression that because you have not literally to imitate the particulars of Christ's life, but *only* to walk according to its spirit, you may go forth and be as careless, as

worldly wise, as grovelling and self-indulgent, as those around you. *Only* to walk according to Christ's spirit. You little know how much *that* involves; how much conflict with flesh and blood; how much that will tax your resolution to the uttermost; how much that implies your becoming what the Gospel says you must become—a "new man, created after God in righteousness and true holiness." So high a thing it is to be a Christian, so difficult to take the least word of Christ, and *live it out* manfully and consistently, that we are after all thrown upon the promise of a reviving and strengthening grace, which alone can create the clean heart, and renew the right spirit of conformity to Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

XII.

THE "SIGN" REFUSED.

ST. MARK viii. 12.

"And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation."

IT was, we may be sure, no mere intellectual deficiency in His hearers which drew this sigh from the gracious Saviour. In the request that He would give them a sign, there was some secret spiritual wrongness, over which Christ grieved. What did they mean by asking a sign? Had they not His wonderful works? And why did He say that no sign should be given when in fact He was giving signs innumerable and conclusive? It is quite plain that Christ's works did not convince them. It is therefore also plain that we greatly overrate the force of miracles as an evidence of Christianity. In present times indeed, they constitute for many

a difficulty and not a help to faith. In those times few, if any, followed Christ because of the miracles. They followed Him because of that all-prevailing power which accompanied the simple words "follow me." They followed Him, because never man spake as He spake, because the message of Divine love carried with it its own overwhelming evidence.

And then we know that vast multitudes witnessed the miracles and yet persistently refused to believe. We fancy that if only a miracle were wrought in our time, it would conquer all opposition. As a simple matter of fact, however, men saw His miracles and went away utterly unconvinced. Some other sign they wanted, something besides curing the blind and cleansing the leper, and raising the dead. They asked, we are told, a "sign from heaven." What they meant by this is not clear. Probably it was some imposing display in the heavens, some disclosure of the Messiah magnificently seated on a material throne, which would confound, amaze, and convince all beholders. Now *that*, the Saviour distinctly asserted, He would not give. He refused first, because they had no right to dictate how much evidence must needs be forthcoming. Man may reasonably, though reverentially, ask as much

evidence as is adequate to satisfy a mind in a right moral and spiritual attitude, and this a God who loves to see His children walking in the truth will assuredly give. But it is not His way to squander proof. Part of our trial here consists, in fact, in God's so adjusting the evidence to our moral condition, that while there is amply enough to determine the acceptance of the honest and good heart, there is no lavishing of proof.

The grand error, however, which underlay the demand of the Pharisees, and which, in my opinion, underlies the demand of sceptics in the present day, is, that any amount of evidence of an external kind can determine the choice, apart from the moral state of the doubter. Suppose the "sign from heaven" given. Suppose that in the sky above Jerusalem had been disclosed the form of the Son of man, as the sun in his strength, ten thousand times ten thousand of the heavenly hosts on the right hand and the left, the first effect would doubtless have been unspeakable and overwhelming awe. But remember; belief in the Christ meant trust in the Christ, the homage of heart and soul. Do you think that the most magnificent display in the heavens would secure that? Do you suppose that

if to-day the millions in London were to look up and see the sign of the Son of man in glory, a twelvemonth hence there would be very much more religion, and very much less drunkenness and blaspheming and uncleanness and idleness and extravagance?

We imagine, with our superficial knowledge of human nature, that Christ by vouchsafing this sign would have won the adhesion of the Jewish people. The fact nevertheless remains that He refused it, with a sigh over their unbelief, and (which is quite as much to the point) that at the transfiguration He vouchsafed it, not to secure the faith of those who believed not, but as an encouragement to those who had believed without it.

I pray you, brethren, to keep in mind that no outward proof *alone* can determine belief in truths moral and spiritual. Every kind of truth has its proper evidence. Mathematical truth has its evidence, but to crave mathematical proof outside its own proper region is unphilosophical, though it is an error which, I humbly think, is often committed, and one which may lead us to suspect that the absorbing study of mathematics disqualifies for, rather than aids, the search after truth of other kinds.

Historical truth again is reached through its own proper evidence; but it is here that we touch upon the very point before us. Christianity rests on a historical basis, and because it does so, sceptics are apt to assume that its truth or falsehood is *merely* matter of historical evidence. Doubtless the historical evidence must be sound, but then comes the question, is every one qualified to judge of its soundness? And, so we have to point out that Christianity has a moral and spiritual basis also, and that, if we accept what the Scriptures themselves tell us, and what is indeed implied in the words of my text, the moral and spiritual evidence was held by Christ to be by far the more constraining in the first days of the Gospel, and must unquestionably be the more commanding and powerful evidence now, when the historical facts have receded to a distance of eighteen hundred years.

It is a simple sort of notion that if you could put twelve men into a jury box you might after lengthened investigation obtain from them a satisfactory verdict on the truth or falsehood of Christianity. It is plain that the historical evidence is so interwoven with moral considerations that men do not reach their verdict merely by its means. Of

course there are historical questions which are so absolutely independent of feeling that they can be decided purely on historical evidence. The question, who was the man in the iron mask, or who wrote Junius? which are for the most part unconnected with moral feeling, can doubtless be so decided. But then how many do so connect themselves? However able and honest a Roman Catholic may be, he is likely to take a different view from that held by a Protestant of the characters of Luther, or Henry VIII., or William of Orange. To the High Churchman Charles the First probably is a martyr; to the Low Churchman he seems bigoted and untruthful.

You will say, "this is so, but it is to be regretted; we ought to judge on purely historical grounds." Be it so. Then let me suggest another case. Suppose there has appeared on the page of history One whom our own hearts and the universal consent of the civilized world pronounce to be perfect goodness, unrivalled purity, divine dignity, love unequalled. I say that if feeling, moral bias, inevitably affected our judgment of mere men, Luther or Charles the First, here it becomes powerful beyond all calculation. What will inevitably happen? Will not

good men yield their love and devotion to Him who is perfect goodness? Will not bad men shrink from Christ and from His perfect purity, and be predisposed to question the historical evidence, because they hope thereby to free themselves from His claim upon their allegiance?

I would venture then to maintain that a bad, an impure, an untruthful man is not in a position to form a fair estimate of the teaching of the New Testament. This is true indeed, more or less, of any noble book that has ever been written. There are books so pure and so lofty in their tone that they are unintelligible to men of an ignoble and sordid nature. Even so there are characters of such genuine goodness, unselfishness, and grandeur of soul that they are merely an enigma to the vulgar and the lowminded. If men thus fail to appreciate human worth unless they are themselves worthy, shall we not be prepared to find that the purity, and the perfection of the Holy One are altogether lost upon those whose hearts are corrupt, that to the "natural man" the things of Christ are foolishness, neither can he know them "because they are spiritually discerned?" Can it be otherwise when infinite goodness makes its entry into a sin-loving

and impure world? For such men there are no signs from heaven. They are not given, simply because they would be useless. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

I have said that sceptics seem to me to be utterly unreasonable in demanding a wrong kind of evidence for spiritual truths. Spiritual truths cannot rest merely or mainly on outward evidence; they have their evidence, conclusive in its kind, but not such as will command the submission of unspiritual men. And this is pre-eminently true of the great doctrines of the existence of God, and the reality of a future life. I do not profess that I could prove the one or the other to any man who chose not to be convinced. But neither could I *prove* to him the existence of right and wrong. You say that you do not possess demonstrative proof of God's being, or of a life beyond this. If you mean that there is no evidence to coerce an unwilling or an untruthful or a sin-beclouded mind, that may indeed be most freely conceded, for to such a mind no moral evidence can bring conviction. There is no such thing as coercion in the region of moral truth. If on the other hand you mean that there is no evidence

which will bring conviction to a mind in a right and healthy condition, with all its faculties, conscience, understanding, and heart, duly developed—there I take leave to differ. The truth is that you want a kind of evidence for spiritual truth which you have no right to demand, and which God will certainly not supply. He will not furnish you with a sign from heaven, and if it were accorded to you it would not ensure conviction. You can, if you like, evade the proof which alone is forthcoming for spiritual truths, but so you can, and so many do in point of fact, evade recognising the stern reality of unchanging right and wrong.

Many; not *all*. There are those who seem to have lost the power of believing, yet to whom their inability is a daily, almost an hourly grief, who would give all they possess to have one single standing-ground of unchanging truth when the waves and storms of life are raging round them. With their case I cannot deal now, further than to say that our one feeling towards them must be profound sympathy, and loving forbearance, and thankfulness that they are in the hands of the great Teacher, and that sooner or later the day will dawn, and the day-star arise in their hearts.

Of them I speak not now. I speak of those who are without God, and without a hope of immortality, because they will not believe without "a sign from heaven," and because no such sign will be given.

This, however, I ask them to observe, that their scepticism may carry them much further than they intend. Remember there is no irresistible demonstration that there is such a thing as unchanging right or wrong; you can be sceptical about that as well as about God or immortality. This is no supposition for the sake of argument. It is a simple fact that multitudes are losing their grasp of elementary morality, and those who would weaken our faith in God and immortality, are bound to show us that they are not also weakening our faith in many other most precious things—in the sacredness of family life, in the obligation of the marriage tie, in the mutual confidence without which commercial dealings become the grossest over-reaching or the most heartless *finesse*.

I cannot irresistibly demonstrate to an impure man that he must be true to his vows in regard to her whom he has declared to be nearest and dearest. I cannot force men to be good to their parents, or

to be honest amidst a thousand temptations to be dishonest, or to refrain from damaging their fellow-men in the fierce competition of mercantile life. I can point to no "sign from heaven" which will constrain you to be pure, or noble, or upright. And therefore I can only beseech you to secure by God's help that one condition of faith which is in your power, deep reverence for the convictions you feel to be true, and unswerving faithfulness to those great elementary dictates of duty which ought to be above all controversy. I do not ask, I do not desire, that you should do violence to any single consideration which may help you to truth, but I remind you that there is one condition without which you, without which no man living, can ever attain and love and appropriate truth; and that is, that he shall love and lay fast hold of goodness. In this age of many opinions, in this critical transition period of ours, I do not, young men, dread for you the unsettling effects of free discussion. If I know myself I do not share that tendency of priests which tempts them to exclude from their minds what they conceive to be dangerous facts. No! facts are not dangerous, but the scepticism of the heart is dangerous, toying with duty is dangerous; intellectual indolence, flippancy, absence of

generous, self-forgetting enthusiasm, these are dangerous; to set forth in pursuit of truth while these master our hearts and warp our judgments is the most hopeless of all enterprises.

Obedience is the condition of faith; obedience to what we know leads to faith in what is yet to be revealed. The good ground in the parable of the Sower, the only ground that brought forth fruit, is explained to be "the honest and good heart," honest, and therefore receptive of everything true; good, and therefore in closest sympathy with the noble, the loving, and the pure. But this is alone of Him from whom comes every good and perfect gift. "Sow then to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you."

XIII.

THE PRIMITIVE EUCHARIST.

1 CORINTHIANS xi, 24.

"This do in remembrance of Me."

IT has been said, with some truth, that the history of the Holy Communion may be fairly considered as a history of the Church itself. The changes in the mode of its observance mark enormous changes in Christian feeling and opinion. The first conception of it was beyond any doubt that of a social meal. It came probably at the conclusion of the Agape, or love-feast. It was partaken of, however distasteful the fact may be to those who are opposed to evening Communion, at the end of the day. The loaves were placed on the table unbroken, and not divided into small pieces. The word "Eucharist," first found in Justin Martyr, points to ideas of cheerfulness and innocent enjoyment, such as in all countries are connected with partaking

of food in common. The chapter before us clearly implies that the Corinthians brought their own food, and consumed it apart. And the participation probably was a daily act.

I do not mean to discuss here the possibility of reverting to these details of primitive observance, or to the expedience of doing so if it were possible. It is enough to say that a great change passed over men's conceptions of this Sacrament. This doubtless was merely the symptom of a profounder change. Men's view of the Eucharist altered, because their idea of Christianity had altered. As early as the second century, the idea, the primitive idea, of an equal brotherhood was being lost, and the grand apostasy had begun which turned the Christian ministry into a sacrificing priestly caste, and by so doing transformed the whole character of Christian worship. But however this may be, there *was* a great change in the mode of celebrating the Holy Communion. It ceased to be a supper, and was celebrated by day. The elements were no longer taken by each member of the congregation for himself, but the administration was confined to the chief minister. It was dissevered from the Agape, or love-feast, which gradually was disused alto-

gether. The table was transformed into an altar. The daily celebration ceased, and the observance of the ordinance was confined to the Lord's Day and festivals.

Nothing marks more significantly the complete transformation of the Sacrament than that this same sacred meal, so simple, natural, intelligible, and joyous, should have come to be spoken of in the days of St. Chrysostom as "the dreadful sacrifice." And if I wished to make evident to an enquirer how widely Christendom has departed from primitive Christianity, I would take him to high mass in a gorgeous cathedral, where amidst clouds of incense, and brilliant colours, and sensational music, and bending worshippers, the "dreadful sacrifice" is professedly offered; and then I would ask him to turn to the Gospels, the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and the Acts of the Apostles, and I would enquire whether the simple rite there described is really identical with the ceremonial which he has been witnessing; whether the transformation of the supper into the "mass" does not indicate a deeper transformation of Christianity itself, and whether, before the gospel is to return to its apostolic purity, and the Church to be revived in its true apostolic idea,

the Supper of the Lord must not be restored to its true position as the witness and pledge of a brotherhood, instead of a mystic performance of priests.

I have assumed what no one I have ever heard of denied—the primitive origin of the Lord's Supper. That such an act was statedly performed in the early Church is about as certain as that there was a Church at all, or that Christ, its founder, lived and died. Even the extremest sceptic doubts it not. No Christian people question the obligation to partake of the Lord's Supper but the Society of Friends, and even they do not deny its primitive observance. The First Epistle to the Corinthians is one of the earliest books of the New Testament, following closely upon the very earliest, the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, and was almost certainly written about the year 57, *i.e.*, twenty-four years after the death of Christ. Now if twenty-four years after the death of the Saviour St. Paul writing to the Corinthians spoke of the Lord's Supper as divinely appointed and as universally observed, and if this evidence is fully sustained by the subsequent volumes of the Gospels and Acts, the demonstration is complete that Christ enjoined this ordinance

and that the primitive believers fulfilled the injunction. And, as I have said, no sceptic, in point of fact, has ever doubted this position, or suggested that the Eucharist was instituted at a later date.

There is one other circumstance connected with the early observance of this ordinance to which I would now direct your particular attention, because it points to the idea which I desire to bring out prominently to-day. The "breaking of bread" was the very object with which the primitive Christians met together. The phrase which you find in the twentieth of Acts expresses as much. "The disciples came together to break bread." This act was of course accompanied by prayer, but prayer, I apprehend, was not the purpose for which they met. So there were doubtless addresses delivered, but to hear addresses was by no means the prominent purpose in the minds of those who assembled. I am quite convinced that with the idea of public worship the Lord's Supper invariably was connected; that, in their estimation, to partake of the Lord's Supper *was* their worship. In fact, we have precisely reversed their practice. We meet for prayer and praise and preaching, to which occasionally we *add* the celebration of the Holy Communion. They

met primarily for the partaking of the Lord's Supper, and prayer and exhortation were accessories. I feel sure that nothing would surprise a primitive Christian more, if it were possible for him to appear amongst us, than to find us assembling together for prayers and the singing of hymns and the listening to a discourse, and then going away, as if we had worshipped, while we are really omitting that in which, according to his view, Christian worship absolutely consisted. As to the notion that the Church was to include two classes of Christians, the communicants and the non-communicants, and that when the supreme act of worship commenced the non-communicating class, being in fact half or two-thirds of the congregation, might withdraw with the impression that they had been engaged in public worship—such a thought would never enter into his head.

Now a very little reflection will show that if there be such an ordinance as the Lord's Supper at all, it must necessarily be the central and supreme act of worship. In it we "show forth the Lord's death." Now what the Lord's death is relatively to other truths of Christianity, that the ordinance of His death must be in relation to other ordinances. If

the death of Christ be merely a subordinate fact, then of course the Lord's Supper must have a subordinate position in Christian worship. But if the death of Christ be the central fact of Christianity, the one ground of trust, then manifestly the Lord's Supper must be the supreme and central and characteristic act of Christian worship.

And what I beg you to observe is this, that so to describe and so to think of the Holy Communion is quite compatible with extreme aversion to superstitious conceptions of it. We may reject transubstantiation, and consubstantiation, and what is now called the "objective presence." We may hold, as I do, that the true presence is a presence in the mind and heart of the worshipper, and that, as our article says, "The mean whereby we receive the body and blood of Christ is faith." We may even accept the extremest Protestant view, and yet the position will remain untouched that the Lord's Supper is "the supreme and central and characteristic act of Christian worship."

Even so it is not at all necessary to hold extreme views of the "real presence" in order to justify that arrangement of our churches which makes the Lord's Table the central object of all. If it be what

I have described it, "the supreme and central and characteristic act of Christian worship," that *ought to be* the central object. As to the hideous device of interposing the reading desk and pulpit as a mighty erection, shutting out the view of the Lord's Table from the worshippers, it could only, and did in point of fact, mark the existence of unworthy and cold feelings in regard to this Holy Sacrament. Yes; and if what I have urged is true, of essentially unscriptural notions about it.

Do not, I pray you, attribute poor and irreverent feelings respecting the Holy Communion to those who are unable to accept what are called "high views" respecting it. The precise objection which many of us have to these views is that they are not "high," but low and materialistic. At all events, they appear to us self-contradictory, and therefore impossible. The deepest feelings of reverence for this Sacrament are perfectly compatible with an inability to accept such views. I know that Protestants often have been cold and irreverent; though any one who has been in Continental churches will be aware that this evil is by no means restricted to Protestants. Luther pathetically describes his sense of pain, when he first visited Rome, on

observing that certain priests who were near him, but at other altars, celebrated seven masses while he was celebrating one. But I am persuaded that a clergyman who administers the Holy Communion rarely, heartlessly, and carelessly, has, more especially at the present time, much to answer for. It is he who creates the reaction in favour of a superstitious observance of the Eucharist. He is the worst enemy to real, enlightened Church feeling.

I know very little about the Church of the future, but it is quite a cherished conviction of mine that whenever that Church, which will not be a new Church but the old Church restored, comes forth in its true proportions, there will at the same time be a replacing of the two Sacraments, freed from modern and scholastic conceptions, in their true relation to the Church and Christianity. They have never been allowed, since apostolic times, to bear their proper testimony to Christ and to the kingdom which Christ has set up on earth. Through man's folly and blindness, they have never witnessed to the true meaning of His Church as He meant them to do. I blame none for attaching a high importance to the Sacraments; the precise point of my censure would be that they have not done so. They have, it is true,

overloaded them with mediæval, and even pagan, imaginations, but their true and primitive import they have, I am afraid we must say systematically, kept out of view. To restore them to their high place will I believe, be one of the achievements of the Church of the future. With truer and higher views of the Church will come truer and higher views of that Sacrament especially which witnesses to and deepens Church fellowship and Church life.

Now, my brethren, I shall leave what has been said, so far as it is accordant with Holy Scripture, to carry its own lesson. I have inferred the central position of the Lord's Supper in Christian worship from the central position of Christ's death, which it shows forth, in Christian belief. As is the atonement of Christ to other truths, so is the Sacrament of His atonement to other elements of worship. The importance of the one is the exact measure of the importance of the other. The one point I now ask you seriously to consider is whether a practical disregard of the ordinance which witnesses to our trust in Christ is compatible with sincere trust in a Crucified Saviour. Can you rationally reconcile your professed reliance upon Him with your habitual absence from that table, at which, by His own appointment,

you confess and seal your reliance? "I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say."

It is not a fair inference that because we press upon you the undoubted obligation to gather round the Lord's Table, we attach too much importance to a formal observance. Granted that not a few present themselves there whose lives are glaringly out of keeping with the solemn act; granted that the mere act of communicating may be the veriest piece of perilous formalism, and therefore may be an absolute addition to your condemnation. There still remains the grave question: can you, calling yourself a Christian, implying therefore that Christ is the source of your spiritual life, justify yourself in treating the Sacrament which, by His appointment, gives expression to this fact, as a mere trivial observance, the omission of which can in no way affect your Christian position? Remember, the receiving may not and will not of itself constitute you a faithful Christian, and yet the non-receiving may be equivalent to a relinquishment of the Christian's hope. I think the matter is plain enough intellectually. I can only trust that in this important matter, we may all have grace, not only to perceive and know what things we ought to do, but faithfully and courageously to do them.

XIV.

THE MATTER, MANNER, AND END OF PREACHING.

COLOSSIANS i. 28.

"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

HERE we have the greatest preacher who ever lived presenting us with his conception of what Christian preaching ought to be. When we speak of St. Paul as the greatest of all preachers, it is by no means implied that he was an unsurpassed orator. He himself intimates that those who were impressed by his writings were disappointed when they saw him face to face. But if to be a great preacher means to proclaim the message of God's love to a vast number of human beings, and to win over many hearts to Him, then undeniably no one can bear comparison with the great apostle. His own statement of what seemed to him the true ideal of Christian preaching cannot fail to be deeply instructive, and this we have before us within the limits of a single verse. My text may

be conveniently considered as setting forth—(1) The *matter* of preaching: "*whom* we preach." (2) The *manner* of preaching: "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom." (3) The *end* of preaching: "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

First, then, the matter of preaching is Christ. Now what is it to preach Christ? We lose much by forgetting that the preaching of the New Testament is literally a proclamation, and that the preacher is, more strictly, a herald. Almost invariably the preaching of which we read in the New Testament was the proclamation of Christ and His salvation to persons who had never heard of Him before, to whom the message 'presented' itself as a new thing. I doubt very much whether St. Paul would have applied the term which we translate "preaching" to the addresses delivered in the assemblies of the faithful. In our time, "preaching" includes the announcement of the message of God to those who have not heard, or at least thought of it before, and also the instruction of those who are already Christians. And this partly arises, no doubt, from the fact that usually in our churches we address a "mixed multitude;" not only those who have an interest in religion and an ex-

perience of its blessings, but those who know little or nothing about it, and care less.

It has been laid down confidently as a sound rule, that in every sermon there ought to be such a statement of the essential truths of the Gospel that a person who had never been in a church before and would never be in one again, would yet acquire from that one discourse a sufficient conception of the way of salvation. But we may reasonably doubt whether this is possible. I do not think St. Paul ever preached such a sermon, and I certainly do not think that I could so formulate Christianity in one sermon of twenty-five minutes long. For, my brethren, to preach Christ is not to preach schemes. It is not to weave systems of redemption, in the vain hope of formulating the Infinite. It is to bring Christ, a personal Christ, before the eyes of men; not tenets about Him; not the language of a school nor the jargon of a party, but Christ Himself, loved and trusted because of His love to us; Christ who has died and risen again, and now speaks to us and in us by His Spirit.

What I mean is, that to repeat Sunday after Sunday certain phrases of theology, and to press those phrases with great vehemence, is, after all, not to

preach Christ. Often the dogma hides the Saviour from us. We know how general and how just is the complaint that certain preachers deliver the same sermon every Sunday, that a difference of text makes no difference in the discourse, and that there is nothing offered for spiritual aliment but certain cut-and-dry statements which disappoint and fret the understanding without touching the conscience or winning the affections. And this is partly due to the maxim I have mentioned, that every sermon must contain a scheme of redemption. Hence it is that much of the preaching power of the great Evangelical party in the Church has passed to men of other schools of theology, while many persons have grown tired of sermons altogether, and declare that they hear nothing on Sunday which strengthens them for their everyday life, or assists them in confronting the dangers and embarrassments of their earthly lot.

To preach Christ then is not to be everlastingly weaving schemes of redemption. It is not to introduce the name of Christ every instant. To preach Christ is so to bring Him before the eyes of men that the sin-oppressed and waiting soul at once responds to the announcement, and exclaims, "This is what I needed; I have found at last that which fully satisfies

my deepest yearnings; heart and flesh have cried out for the living God, and here He is!" To preach Christ is to believe that the world has a profound need, and that in Christ the Son is the response to that need. To preach Christ is to meet men's longings for some assurance that the awful Unseen One cares for them and will not destroy them, but has made provision for their deliverance from the things that degrade and enslave them. And let me add, that to preach Christ is to believe, and to act on the belief, that Christ Himself is preaching in the depths of human hearts, so that while we speak to the outward ear He is speaking and revealing Himself within. That gives me an immense confidence in delivering the message; the feeling, I mean, that the word from without will find something to respond to it within the heart; that for what I have to tell the soul is inquiring; and that God is preparing it to meet and to accept His own overtures of salvation.

But, preaching Christ in this sense, we can deal with every conceivable subject which we may feel called to introduce into the pulpit. We can seek guidance upon the questions of the day; we can consider the social needs and wrongnesses of our time; we can enter into the details of everyday duty.

We must have often heard religious people speaking contemptuously of "mere morality." Certainly if it be *mere* morality, in the sense of inculcating morals without reference to that which gives to morality its reality, they are right. But any man who speaks contemptuously of morals does not know what they mean. St. Paul could find a place in his profoundest epistles for morality; and so long as, like him, we treat morality as the manifestation of a regenerated nature, and *that* again as the result of God's redemption, we shall in preaching morality be preaching Christ, and in preaching Christ we shall find it necessary to teach and enforce a very high Christian morality. And let me tell these despisers of morality, that if there had been more teaching of homely duty from the pulpit, we should have fewer persons making a loud proclamation of their belief that they are "the Lord's dear people," when in the most elementary points of morals—purity, honesty, kindheartedness, humility—they do not reach even to the level of the average people around them, but can be as vulgarly selfish, shifty, and vain as the worldliest of the worldly.

But we must, passing from the matter of Christian preaching, observe what St. Paul indicates, secondly,

as to its manner; "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom." Christ is the satisfaction for every need of our nature. Now in that nature there are two great departments, the moral and the intellectual. We are therefore prepared to find that Divine truth addresses itself to these; and consequently the Christian teacher is bound to address himself to them, and to both of them. Until Christianity came into the world they were in conflict. The false religions addressed themselves, after a fashion, to the spiritual part of man, but, stultifying the intellect, ended in the degradation of both. False philosophy appealed to the intellect, but, treating man practically as if he had no heart and no conscience, proved but a cruel mockery. Now a corrupt Christianity has followed the leading of other corrupt religions, and has outraged intellect, or at best has left it, as Dr. Arnold well said, as a fallow field, in which all ill weeds may root themselves.

I am giving no exaggerated description of what passes for Christianity in the world, when I say that an immense proportion of it makes no provision whatever for the satisfaction of our intellectual needs, and treats the understanding, not as a God-given faculty, but as a presumptuous and noxious tendency

which we are to put down with a strong hand. But true religion honours alike the heart and the understanding; and St. Paul honoured them, for he felt that his preaching must include warning and teaching—warning for the conscience, teaching for the understanding. But I must add emphatically that the sermon should never be addressed exclusively to the intellect. We must warn as well as teach; not, however, in the terms of vulgar and presumptuous rant by which those who were called by John Foster "damnation preachers" vainly try to frighten men into being religious. Yes, vainly; for their hearers soon grow accustomed to it. Indiscriminate raving about hell-fire is accepted by coarser and less thinking minds as the proper strain for a minister of religion to indulge in, and they listen to him and go away, the only effect probably being that they are just a little more hardened. Men with more active and sensitive consciences are absolutely untouched, and find themselves hindered rather than aided in apprehending the awful realities of the world unseen. Such pulpit teaching seems to them to be little more than "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

And if some clergymen, feeling that the claims of

the intellect are but too little honoured in the pulpit, seem to honour them too much, and if their preaching be thought by some too coldly intellectual, after all it is a great point to gain to the side of Christianity the interest of more active thinkers, to prevent, if it may be so, their being forced into open or secret antagonism. It is, after all, but redressing the onesidedness which, I do think, attaches to the greater part of pulpit teaching, because it appeals to the feelings to the disparagement of the reason.

But this being said, it is needful to say also that we must warn as well as teach, and that the declaration of Divine judgment against sin must never be kept out of sight. You do not, as it has been truly said,[1] improve the picture by taking the shade out of it, and it is an utterly false conception of Christianity which would eliminate God's displeasure against sin, and therefore would dispense with the need of warning men of the sure consequences of sin, and therefore would keep out of view the faith and penitence through which alone comes salvation. The fact of God's judgment is not a pleasant fact, but the business of the preacher is not to tell men what is pleasant but what is true. You do not like

[1] By Alexander Knox.

to think that God will punish sin hereafter. I ask you why it should be so very difficult to accept this belief, when you find as a stern matter of fact that He does so now? Is all rose-coloured and sunny and soft in His government now? Do not men suffer in *this* world for ill-doing? Has not God His methods of dealing even here with those who violate His laws? Is there any sense or courage in turning away from the unpleasant facts of life, simply because they are unpleasant? Divine judgment is not a tenet —it is a fact. God is judging now, and this takes away all antecedent improbability that He will judge hereafter; nay, it throws the improbability all on the other side. Therefore it is that "knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men." We do not denounce them; we do not imagine ourselves the depository of heaven's thunder; we speak as ourselves liable to Divine judgment; but we pray them, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God.

But it remains, thirdly and lastly, having considered the matter and the manner of preaching, to state briefly, from the text, the *end* of preaching— "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Perfection does not mean in the New Testament—it *cannot* mean—the entire absence of even

the faintest deflexion of our will from God's will. What it does mean is *maturity*—the adequate development of every faculty. The child speaks, understands, thinks as a child. The balance of the faculties has not been attained. It is clever and attractive and often good, but not complete. Completeness, maturity, balance, are the attributes of manhood. It is a just observation, that what tells in life is the balanced character, not the brilliant endowments which may coexist with much feebleness, but the just proportion of all faculties and endowments which is reached when men are presented "perfect in Christ Jesus."

Is religion, then, a thing for the intellect? or does it involve the feelings only? or does it confess the supremacy of conscience? Not any one of these by itself, but all taken together, when the Spirit of Christ, moving over the face of the waters, diffuses order where all had been "without form and void." Christianity, my dear brethren, is not an assent to propositions alone, or a series of amiable sentiments alone, or a kindling of the emotions alone, or a multiplying of forms, or an awakening of vague terrors, or a grim and baleful superstition. It is a life—"the life of God in the soul of man"—working through

every department of his nature, assigning to every faculty its proper place, conscience dominating over all, and God's blessed Spirit instructing conscience as to what is the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God." That at least is our ideal. That is the *end* of preaching. Christ the light of the understanding, the highest object of the affections, the Lord of the conscience! Less than this is not Christianity; more than this no system can propose as its end and aim. And unless you and I, through all our ignorance and inconsistency, be following on to attain this, we are Christians in name only and not in fact. If, amidst failure and hard conflict, we lose not sight of our ideal, but press forward for the prize of God's high calling in Christ, He will own us for His; and having overcome as He overcame, we shall sit down with him in heavenly places, and see His face, and share His triumphs.

XV.

SAINTLINESS

ROMANS i. 7.

"Called to be saints."

IT is curious and instructive to observe how completely the use of the word "saint" in its only Scriptural sense has been discontinued in Christendom. In the New Testament it is the recognised title of all professing Christians, and is never, so far as I am aware, employed to indicate persons who are distinct, by reason of unusual holiness, from the rest of the Christian community. A concordance gives nearly sixty passages in which it seems to stand for all persons calling themselves Christians, so that it was in fact the customary and conventional term to describe all and any who named the name of Christ.

Seldom or never is it so used now. A clergyman thus habitually employing the word would lay him-

self open to the charge of cant, and whenever the term is employed by Evangelical clergymen it is understood to point to persons who make a more marked profession of religious convictions than do ordinary churchgoers. When used by others, it mostly denotes certain notabilities of Christendom, supposed by the Christian Church, or some section of it, to have special claims to veneration, as St. James, St. Ambrose, or St. Ignatius Loyola. The Scriptural use of the word has been virtually discontinued; the modern use of it finds no sanction in the New Testament. But of this we may be sure, that there never would have been such a sweeping revolution in its use had there not been some vast change in the nature of the things meant to be expressed.

What, let us ask ourselves, was that change? The word "saint" in the New Testament embodies what to us, at least, are two distinct ideas; first, that those so called are set apart to be holy persons; secondly, that they *are* holy persons: first, the ideal to which they should aspire, and next, the Christian excellence to which, in point of fact, they have attained. But while to us these ideas are very obviously distinct, I do not think they were so clearly

separate in the minds of St. Paul and his converts, and for this reason, that in the primitive Church those who were called to be holy were in fact holy, or that, at least to a great extent, the actual corresponded to the ideal. I have a dread of insinuating into the language of Scripture an element of fiction, and so I shrink from affirming that St. Paul, when he called his converts "saints," merely meant that they *ought to be* holy. We, looking over eighteen hundred dreary years of false profession, are only too familiar with the fact that profession does not by any means imply practice; that privileges do not necessarily lead to duties; that baptism is no unfailing evidence that a man is in any real sense a Christian; that many of the wickedest men that ever lived have been within the pale of the Christian Church, and made their churchmanship the pretext for their wickedness, while not a few of the best have been outside its pale, thrust out in many cases *because* they were good men and true.

This is all sadly plain to us, but the terrible divergence between profession and practice had only begun in apostolic times. I do not forget how much there was of weakness and wrongness in the primitive communities, nor do I concur with those

who look back to a golden age of the Church when orthodoxy was unsullied, and obedience was faultless. True Church history knows of no such period, but I do notwithstanding conceive that the primitive believers were *substantially* what they professed to be; good men, and loyal to the law of Christ; and furthermore, that there was little goodness of the highest quality outside the Christian community. But, "the crown has fallen from our heads, woe unto us that we have sinned!" The time arrived, accelerated probably by the establishment of Christianity under the Emperor Constantine, when to apply the term "saint" to every baptised man would have been a miserable fiction and an impious mockery. There was no alternative but to lay it aside, or else to reserve it for those who, being really holy persons, had a claim to it in fact and truth.

You see then that it would be hopeless to try to revive the Scriptural use of the word, just because the state of things which made that use of it appropriate has utterly passed away. We shrink from calling men "saints" who are not saintly. But observe the terrible misconception which grew out of the transfer of the name "saint" from the whole body of the faithful to a certain spiritual *élite*.

Saintliness was no longer a characteristic of *all* Christian men. It pointed to some pre-eminence which belonged to a few, to an ideal which every-day Christians were not expected to propose to themselves. To find a way into that spiritual aristocracy it was almost a necessity to "withdraw from the world," as it was termed; the soldier was not to have his citizenship in heaven in the same sense as the monk; the name of "religious" was restricted to members of monastic orders. And so grew up the hateful fiction, not yet exploded, of two spiritual grades in Christianity; of two rules of life; of acts over and above duty, called works of supererogation; of the laity's being exempt from the claims of Christ's sacred law, in its breadth and stringency.

Another complication arose. Persons found in the lives of those who were confessed to be saints or were canonised, traits which seemed to them unattractive and even revolting. The truth is, that certain of those who bear the title of "saint" have not only been extremely disagreeable persons, but have spoken and acted in a manner that would have been quite unendurable in men of the world. Under the cloak of zeal for God they have been guilty of what,

according to our worldly morality, would be deemed abominable meanness and cruelty. To take one example of the peculiar traits developed by mediæval saintliness, though I can only touch it very lightly indeed: whereas in this benighted nineteenth century we believe in John Wesley's motto that "cleanliness is next to godliness," and, in the spirit of our deluded modern civilisation, actually think it worth while to try and persuade people to keep themselves and their dwellings pure, and to believe that water is a gift of Providence to be used for other purposes besides drinking,—the mediæval Saints, whose lot was cast in the "ages of faith," before the hateful thing called progress was thought of; these acted on quite a different principle. Details of course are impossible. It is enough to say that they, many of them, found a help to saintliness in the most unutterable physical foulness, and that their admirers claimed superior sanctity for them on the ground, amongst others, that they never indulged in the luxury of keeping themselves clean.[1]

Now, when facts like these, and even worse, were connected with superior saintliness, was it not the

[1] See Lecky's "History of European Morals," vol. ii. chap. iv.

most natural thing in the world for men to conclude that saintliness was something essentially different from the elementary morality which men of the world recognise? It seemed often very unamiable, and saints might do deeds which in other men would be reprehensible, but then it had an ecclesiastical value. If it did not render men kinder and more practically useful in this world, at all events it secured them a conspicuous place in the next. Goodness then, simple goodness, was one thing; saintliness was another. The Psalmist had, it is true, said that he who spake the truth in his heart, and slandered not with his tongue, and swore oaths which he meant to keep, and abstained from taking reward against the innocent—should never fall; but then that was "mere morality." Saintliness, doubtless, was something much better; at least when your main object was to go to heaven. Is it any wonder that men's conceptions of right and wrong became so fearfully bewildered that the conscience of Christendom, in absolute desperation, broke away from the theology of the day, and recurred to the simple conception that a "saint" is in fact in the New Testament a Christian man; that therefore every professing Christian ought to be a saint; and that saintliness

means merely living "righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world."

I am not here suggesting the preposterous assumption of a fanatical Protestantism, that there were not many real saints in what we call, not untruly, the dark ages. Nor do I wish to weaken that veneration for the pure and the good and the God-fearing of past ages, which is recognised in the observance of All Saints' Day.[1]

We are no Christians if we do not seek to imitate those "who through faith and patience inherit the promises." We are not true men ourselves, as Mr. Carlyle has taught us, if we do not know a great man when we meet him, and yield him our heartiest veneration. Young men, eschew the miserable, cynical spirit, which would hinder you from bowing, in truest reverence, before worth and genius and nobleness of character. It is a most curious and instructive fact that Auguste Comte, the prophet of the most popular and most relentless form of unbelief, recognised, towards the close of his life, the craving of the human heart for something higher than itself, something to which it can look up; and while he forbade the effort to turn for its satisfaction

[1] Preached on All Saints' Day.

to the All-perfect One, actually compiled a kalendar, in which every day in the year is appropriated to the honour of some notable person, some Positivist Saint. It is unquestionable that saint-worship and hero-worship are indigenous in the human mind, and that if you withdraw the influence which Christianity exerts in preventing these tendencies from degenerating into idolatry, you will but lead up to some novel form of superstition, more degrading and portentous than any the world has yet seen.

Be sure of this, that the article of the Creed, "the Communion of Saints" has not lost its meaning; that we have rather to set it free from the narrow and sectarian limitations which have been imposed upon it. Never, since the Saviour passed into the heavens, has there been wanting a succession of the pure and the good and the Christlike; the *true* "apostolic succession,"—through whom the Church has maintained its vitality; the very salt of the earth, saving it from utter moral corruption.

"Still through decaying ages as they glide,
Thou lov'st Thy chosen remnant to divide;
Sprinkled along the waste of years
Full many a soft green isle appears:
Pause where we may upon the desert road,
Some shelter is in sight, some sacred safe abode."

The Protestant who denies the saintliness of many in mediæval days, and in the Romish Communion then and now, is at once very ignorant and very narrow-hearted. I envy not the man who cannot see that the love of Christ, pure and deep, dwelt in such noble souls as Elizabeth of Hungary, Louis the Ninth of France, St. Carlo Borromeo, St. Vincent de Paul; last, not least, the saintly Fénelon, who was never canonised, because his corrupt Church and corrupt age were incapable of appreciating him. Wherever we meet them, the fruits of the Holy Ghost must be acknowledged, for to deny them is something akin to the sin against the Holy Ghost. We must not claim them for Bishop Ken and George Herbert, and deny them to Archbishop Leighton and Fletcher of Madeley. We must not refuse our homage to Henry Martyn, because he was puritanical, or to Bishop Patteson, because he was High Church, or to Thomas Arnold and Frederick Denison Maurice, because the world labelled them as "Broad." As to the astonishing notion that beyond the pale of the Church of England there is no saintliness, we cannot treat it as worthy of discussion. We do seriously think ourselves bound to revere that host of great and good men beyond our own

borders represented by such as Thomas Chalmers, and Robert Hall, and John MacLeod Campbell. We actually have some honest respect and love reserved for John Bunyan, and Dr. Watts (respecting whom Dr. Johnson, rigid Churchman as he was, confessed that any Church might be proud of him); and Samuel Rutherford, and Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, and Mrs. Fry, the Quakeress.

We are not bound to supply a theory in this matter. We may be surprised that God has given His Spirit without regard to ecclesiastical distinctions, but we see as a fact that He *has*. Our business is simply to revere the good when we have proved them to *be* good, and to determine by a man's works whether he has Christ's love and Christ's Spirit in his heart. "Here is the patience and faith of the Saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." What had this "great cloud of witnesses" in common, notwithstanding their wide intellectual and theological diversities? Nothing mystified; nothing transcendental; simple goodness, simple devotion to God, simple love to their fellow-creatures.

There is something almost sublime in the contrast of ideas suggested by the Epistle and Gospel for this

day's service. Sharing in the sublime vision of the Apocalypse, wherein was seen "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindred, and people and tongues" gathered before the throne of God, we look upon the white robes and the palm branches; we hear the mighty swell of angelic voices. And then at once we pass to the gathering of a few peasants on a hill-side in Galilee, and listen to the simple words which even now speak to what is deepest in all human hearts: "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" "Blessed are the meek;" "Blessed are the pure in heart;" "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." And what is this but simple Christian goodness? Are there then some precepts still higher than these, which ensure saintliness? Have we not rather reverted to the elementary teaching of the New Testament? Every good man is a Saint. Every professedly Christian man ought to be a Saint. Every one who names the name of Christ is bound to love and serve Christ. Every man who is led by Christ's Spirit is in possession of a power by which he may live a saintly life, and yet a simple human life, *in* the world but not *of* it.

XVI.

SIN NOT DISABILITY.

PROVERBS xiv. 9.

"Fools make a mock at sin."

WHAT is that mysterious thing which is expressed in the short word "Sin?" Those old Hebrews thought and wrote a good deal about it. Has it lost its reality? Is it an exploded notion, which religious teachers try to preserve in order to sustain their own influence? In a thousand years or so will the word drop out of our dictionaries, superseded by some term supplied by the physiologist? The answer to these questions depends upon what we mean by sin. And what we must apprehend is, that vast numbers have never formed any accurate conception as to what sin is; that this is, nevertheless, the very first lesson of our spiritual education; and that all which is false in faith and practice is connected with trivial

and insufficient impressions about the meaning of this little word.

We look back, *e.g.*, to the mighty system of rites and performances, of clerical intervention, of confession and self-torturing and absolution, which was developed in the Middle Ages. It was doubtless built up through the passionate longing of the heart for relief from the biting sense of remorse. But equally certain it is that it would not have acquired its vast magnitude if men had retained a keen perception of the nature of sin. They never would have laid the unction to their souls that performances could touch the deep-seated wrongness of the human heart, or the word of a priest bring deliverance from moral evil. And certain it is, moreover, that this gigantic apparatus for dealing with sin became, whatever it may have been originally, a skilfully adjusted series of expedients for helping men to be light-hearted and comfortable under the power of their sin. Meant to relieve the fretted and clamorous conscience, it *did* relieve it, but it was by coaxing it into the sleep of death.

The brigand, seeking his priest's blessing before going forth to plunder and to kill; the wicked king, stopping in the commission of his crimes to say the

prescribed prayer; the lady of quality, beginning the day with scrupulous devotion and austerities, and ending it in dissipation; the worldly and frivolous woman of fashion, leaving the confessional with airy tread, because she thinks all has been made safe and right with God until the next appointed time to present herself comes round: these are instances in which the quick perception of sin, *as sin*, is absolutely impossible. Sin indeed is looked on as little more than disability. Then, however, against this tremendous system came a tremendous reaction. There are times when conscience cries "sleep no more," and the narcotics of ecclesiasticism lose their effect. To multitudes the message of God's free grace in Christ and of His unmerited love and of the power of His Spirit, which enabled them to grapple with sin instead of trying to make terms with it, to disenthral conscience instead of plying it with impostures, was nothing less than life from the dead.

But, alas, for that message in its breadth and simplicity, men began to substitute doctrinal subtilties which converted faith from being the heart's trust in a Father and Redeemer, into an achievement of theological acumen. The soul was invited to stay itself upon fictions. The Atonement was presented as

a commercial transaction by which men bought themselves off from punishment; was emptied of all its meaning, its efficacy to draw them to God. And all this grew out of insufficient conviction of sin. Again; I have known professing Christians who declined to use the Lord's Prayer because they could not think of asking God to forgive them their trespasses, inasmuch as they had been forgiven long before and once for all, and they could not speak of themselves as in any way affected as to their spiritual position by what may have subsequently occurred. It is hard, indeed, to understand how any one deeply conscious of his own daily and hourly imperfections can adopt such a tone.

And then a false conception of the depravity of human nature really involves a fatal mistake as to the nature of sin. The very idea of sin is resistance to that which is higher; but if there be nothing higher, there is no sin. If man can think no thought and perform no act, except such as are odious to God, he cannot sin against light, for he has none, and so you exclude moral responsibility altogether. A man cannot be said to follow the worse if there be not a better, or what comes to the same thing, if he cannot apprehend the better. Again, where, as in the case of the

Unitarian, there is a lower view of the work of Christ, holding Him forth only as an admirable teacher, it is scarcely matter of surprise to find what most of us would feel to be a less intense consciousness of the sinfulness of sin, as though it were just a scratch on the surface of our humanity, and not an ulcer threatening what was most vital. This probably was the recoil from that false and extravagant view of man's depravity of which I have spoken. And I would by no means convey that individual Unitarians may not have a profound sense of sin. Doubtless they have. I am only speaking of a too frequent characteristic of their teaching, which others cannot help observing, and of which they themselves, I believe are not altogether insensible.

In short, look where you will in the religious world, you ever find, underlying erroneous religious conceptions, a disposition to misconceive the true nature of sin, and therefore to be insensible to its malignity. But the most imminent danger in this respect is not so much from the religious world (though this is indeed great), as, I shall not say from Science, but from the speculations of certain scientific men, and from the disposition to restrict science to the observation of merely material phenomena. Do the words

"right and wrong" mean anything? Do they point to facts, to phenomena if you will? If so, to what phenomena do they point? To speciality of temperament? To some particular condition of the nervous system? To more or less efficiency of digestive power? To more or less phosphorus in the structure of the brain? To qualities and habits physically transmitted?

I would not indeed be herein misconceived. We have no right to foreclose the inquiries of scientific men on these great questions. Happily too we have not the power. I thank God that we have not; for I hold it would be as adverse to the interests of religion as of science to have these great issues huddled up now to irritate and fester, and at a later date to break out again with desolating violence. But I think we have a right to insist that the *whole* question shall be stated. It will not do to taunt theologians, and especially liberal theologians, with a disingenuous reserve, if a suspicion of reserve hangs about the teachings of some of our scientific men. Is there something secretly held which they do not like to speak out? You know probably my own very deep convictions on this point. I think the things in question, at this time of controversy, are not merely the

dates of certain canonical books, or the tenability of a "supernatural religion," or even the being of a personal God or the reality of eternal life. The scepticism which touches these things, in my mind, cannot stop there; it logically touches also the most elementary questions of right and wrong. It distinctly affects the very idea of obligation. It notably enters into the ideas of the sanctity of marriage and of property.

But, my brethren, I claim no infallibility, and quite conceivably I may be wrong. What, however, I *have* a right to demand, and what sceptics, if they be honest men, are bound to concede, is, that *that* matter shall be faced. You can testify, I trust, that I have ever kept myself free from the senseless and undiscriminating invective against philosophers, which means too often either ignorance or disingenuousness. But I own to my growing suspicion that some of those who have called most loudly for unshrinking inquiry, and preached most vigorously the duty of being outspoken, are not quite prepared to face all the questions they have themselves raised. One cannot suppose that such acute thinkers have failed to see the subject from this point of view, but the way in which the difficulty

is quietly put on one side suggests some curious and not altogether satisfactory reflections. Now plain people cannot be expected to form an opinion on delicate ethical or religious questions, but about elementary morality they do know something, and if they have reason to believe that any system logically "improves morality out of creation," they will deal with it, and I think they are quite right in doing so, very summarily indeed.

Christian apologists are often taxed with putting formulas in the place of things, and who shall say that the charge is ill-grounded? But I am prepared to maintain that, if the method of the latest scepticism be true, the phrase "right and wrong" becomes the emptiest and at the same time the most misleading of formulas. If sin be nothing more than disability, why not call it disability? Just, I venture to answer, because, according to the suggestive words of Pascal, "as reason confounds the dogmatists, so does nature the sceptics." That which lies deepest in our nature; that which we may trust much more safely than any intellectual conclusion whatever, tells us that sin *is* something more than disability. Man is not a mere creature of circumstance, a mere product of nature. "If (as has been justly said) the soul is simply dis-

posed of by agencies provided and set in train, without any questions asked of her, she can have no duties, she can win no deserts; she can incur no guilt, merit no punishment; she is deluded in her remorse, and suffers a vain torture in esteeming herself an alien from God." Man, in such case, is no more responsible for his place in the scale of excellence than the plant which, according to its seed and soil, becomes the hyssop of the wall, the lily of the field, or the cedar of Lebanon. On this theory, duty is the same as interest; guilt is merely disease; and holiness is only another name for good health.

Either morals and religion are to be merged in physiology, or they are not. If philosophers think they are, let them say so, and if their saying so evokes the reprobation of men of homely morality, why, they must bear it and its consequences. They ought to be able to do so, for they are unceasingly proclaiming the high principle of truth at any sacrifice. If they have some way of harmonising their views with religion and morality, then let them produce it without loss of time. Until they indicate to us how the interests of plain honesty, purity, mutual confidence, devotion to truth, can be reconciled with the negation of God and righteousness and immor-

tality, we shall be more than justified in declining to reckon with them on merely intellectual grounds.

Yes; "Nature confounds the sceptics." You and I need not reason about sin, for we feel and know it. We are conscious of its *personal* nature; that our sin is ours and not another's; that we knew it to be sin and yet did it; that we did it when we could have refrained from it. We cannot, in truthful moments, urge that we were aware of no other course, or that we did not think it signified which course we took, or that we could not help it. If we can honestly put in any one of these pleas, why then it was not sin, because it did no violence to the witness that was in us. But we know in our inmost hearts that we have done acts which we cannot so justify. Other people may make excuses for us, but *we* are perfectly well aware that they cannot avail. It was not infirmity; it was sin. We did it; we could have helped doing it; we are guilty for having done it.

"Fools make a mock at sin," and only fools will controvert this immediate and instinctive testimony of conscience, conscience compelled by inexorable fact to give evidence against ourselves. As long as the child blushes at its first falsehood, so long will

the reality of right and wrong remain unquestionable by good men, and never till that blush ceases to follow the lie, will you resolve sin into disability. I implore those in whom that testimony is still quick and powerful to believe that it is folly and misery to resist it. You, young men, know full well that if you have yielded to ignoble and degrading influences, there has come, unerringly and at once, a stinging sense of shame, a feeling of outrage done to that manly self-respect which God has put into your heart.

Possibly you fought against such a consciousness. You thought yourself a fool for being ashamed. It was "only what other young men did." It was weak-minded of you to allow the remembrance of your mother's loving counsel to shake your stout-heartedness. If it had, at Confirmation or any other solemn moment, been your resolve to live a pure, noble, man's life and Christian's life; well, perhaps that was being ridiculously heroic and impracticable? Was it? Allow no such thought. The folly was all on the other side. "Fools make a mock at sin," and only fools can think that to

"Quench the blushes of ingenuous shame"

can end otherwise than in deeper shame, and sin,

and suffering. None but a fool can think it right or wise to erect "what other young men do" into a criterion of morality. No gibes or jokes of simpletons or profligates can make a disgusting action anything but disgusting; can turn sweet into bitter, or bitter into sweet. Loyalty to your own heart's conviction is wisdom, is safety. The man who tries to persuade you that sin is not sin, that conscience is a mere nuisance to be summarily silenced, is no associate for you. Loyalty to conviction is just the distinction between the good and great, and the morally and mentally feeble.

One thing is clear, that Christianity recognises no compromise. The love of the Father, the cross of Christ, the indwelling of the Spirit of Holiness, mean, if they mean anything in regard to our attitude towards sin, unfaltering and undying hatred and resistance. Hence "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Only a courage and enthusiasm inspired by God Himself can help us to be "more than conquerors through Him who has loved us."

XVII.

THE MOTE AND THE BEAM.

ST. LUKE vi. 41, 42.

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye."

MORALITY is not religion, but morality and religion have such an organic unity that they cannot be dissevered. I mean, of course, true religion and true morality; the religion which reveals God, and the morality which rests on broad and immutable principles. Of course as a matter of fact there is much religion which has nothing whatever to do with morality. A high authority on this subject tells us that "in remote prehistoric times, and for a vast period of history, though morality and religion were both existing and powerful, they were entirely or almost entirely separate

agents, derived from different sources, acting by different powers, and enforced by different authorities." The native Australian and the Kaffir have a religion, such as it is, and they are not without a rudimentary morality, but they do not in the slightest degree connect the two. They have their gods on the one hand, and they recognise the duties, *e.g.*, of kindness to their families or to strangers on the other; but it does not seem to occur to them that there is any particular connection between their religious feelings and these duties, or that their divinities would be pleased or displeased by their behaviour in these respects.

Now this fact may form the starting-point of what seems to me a very powerful argument for the truth of Christianity. False religions sever religion and morality. When the religion is a very degraded one the severance is complete. In proportion as a true element is found in it, morality and religion have points of contact. But never until you turn to the Gospel, do you find the connection complete. In corrupt forms even of Christianity, you observe them more or less dissevered, but exactly in proportion as Christianity becomes purer and more spiritual, in that proportion does the union become perfect. Surely, if Christianity be the only religion which thus incorporates

morality into itself, rendering itself intensely moral, and the morality intensely religious, it does in virtue of this very fact stand apart from all other religions, and so far manifest itself as alone true and divine. "Other systems (said Archbishop Whately) make religion a part of morality, but Christianity makes morality a part of religion."

I am led to say this by the precept before us, and indeed by the teaching throughout of the Sermon on the Mount. We are to be kind to others, ready to forgive, slow to judge. Now, these duties might be recommended to us upon merely utilitarian and prudential grounds, but Christ connects them in a very wonderful way with the highest religious ideas. He makes the morality grow out of the religion. We are to be kind because God is kind; ready to forgive because God is merciful; slow to judge because we have a Judge whose dealings with us will be regulated by our dealings with each other. So you see that when we speak of the morality of the Gospel we are not speaking of that which is divided and separable from the principles of the Gospel, but of that which naturally grows out of them. Other men besides the Christian may be kind, merciful, forbearing, but none can rest these duties on the same sublime and

spiritual ideas which constitute the Christian's motive.

Let us now say something of the caution given to us in the words before us, reading it in the light of the great truths which we find in the context. First, then, if a Christian man be thoroughly penetrated with the truth respecting his own relations and those of other men, to God, it is quite certain that judging and reproving others will be a work which, as far as may be, he will decline. And this for two reasons. First, because he doubts his own knowledge of other men; and next, because he doubts the strength of his own sympathy. He feels that to reprove and judge he ought almost to be infallible. What a complex thing human character is! How impossible it is to classify men merely as good or bad. In the good, some grave defect is like the fly in the ointment of the apothecary. In the bad, traits disclose themselves of the most admirable kind, qualities the most engaging. The only thing you feel clear about is men's surprising inconsistency.

And then how hard it is to analyse motive and to gauge precisely the forces which have resulted in a particular action. A person is guilty of some grievous wrong-doing. Do you think you have ex-

hausted the question of his actual criminality by directing your attention to the immediate motive? The act is not the result of that motive only, but of the whole of his past life. Do you know, can you possibly know, enough of that life to warrant a judgment upon the degree of his criminality? Some critical event may have taken place far back, years ago, perhaps when he was a little child; some outburst of temper unchecked; some lie that was not found out; some small dishonesty unpunished; some depraving influence of school-fellows or servants; and the character received a bias which it has maintained ever since. And then there arises that most perplexing question, how far temperament may be accepted as extenuating sin. And who that feels the force of all this will not feel also thankful if he can escape the business of reproving and judging!

But moreover he distrusts his own power of sympathy. He has detected himself so often in harsh and indiscriminate judgments that he feels it safest not to judge at all. He knows that his temptation is to hardness and impatience and haphazard condemnation. He feels that there is little danger from excessive sympathy, but much danger from

want of sympathy. I am now speaking of such faults and wrongnesses in our fellow-men as cause harm or discomfort to ourselves. We can all be charitable enough when we are not the sufferers. We can balance very philosophically the merits and the demerits of the person who has wronged our neighbours. But when some one has been rude or untruthful or calumnious or extortionate to ourselves, to stop short and say, "Let me not judge this man too harshly; perhaps I do not take a dispassionate view of his conduct; perhaps he may have had tremendous temptations of which I have known nothing. Let me sit down and try to imagine our places changed—to think, if I were he, what excuses I could make for my conduct, and how I could reasonably expect the person I had wronged to act towards me; God make me fair, gentle, truthful, calm:"—ah! my brethren, this (though it be no more than the Sermon on the Mount requires) is saintly, this is heroic, and only that grace which turns men to saints or heroes can help us to attain it.

Of course we are to take care that sympathy does not become maudlin laxity; that we do not part with that feeling which is also essentially Christian—a good, strong, hearty indignation against all that is

base and false and cruel. Of course there are times when we not only *may* but *must* judge. In fact, judgment is either a duty or a sin ; and if it is a duty, it must be fulfilled under a due sense of responsibility. I would cite here, as an instance of maudlin and misplaced sympathy, the readiness with which some persons give recommendations and testimonials to persons wholly undeserving—a most pernicious and perverted form of good-nature.

But now, besides these thoughts, which may well make us slow to judge, our want of knowledge and our want of sympathy ; there is the most conclusive thought of all—our own demerit ; our lying open ourselves to God's judgment and to man's.

> " Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once ;
> And He that might the vantage best have took,
> Found out the remedy : how would you be
> If He, which is the top of judgment, should
> But judge you as you are ! Oh, think on that,
> And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
> Like man new made."

But we must not forget that the case which the Saviour here points to is not simply that of one judging another, who is himself an evil-doer, but the case of one judging another whose sin is to that of the person he censures as the beam to the mote.

This of course is the extremest case of wrong judg-

ment. You think, perhaps, that of such aggravated unfairness you could not be guilty. I would only ask you, have you never detected it in others, and should not this lead you to suspect that you may not be quite blameless yourself? Do you not see that where people fail in cases innumerable is in the power of graduating offences? A slight omission is as a grave delinquency. But when we are wrong-doers ourselves, and when we see our own acts under the colouring lights of self-love;[1] when we review them with the help of all the apologies and extenuations which we are able to devise, and then turn to other persons' acts, all these lights being withdrawn, and criticise them in a clear, cold, and speculative way, or (even worse) under the influence of anger or jealousy or prejudice, is it not quite certain that we shall think less of the beam in our own eye than of the mote in our brother's eye?

It may be a commonplace, but it is a commonplace which cannot be too habitually remembered, that whereas we are apt to judge others strictly and ourselves leniently, our safer, because our more truthful, course is to judge ourselves strictly and others

[1] "The chameleon darkens in the shade of him that bends over it to ascertain its colours."—Coleridge. *Aids to Reflection.* Aphorism vi.

leniently. We must, in other words, allow for the disturbing influence of self-love. I am now making a demand upon myself and you the most stringent and severe which can be made. This power of truthfully comparing our own demerits with those of others is one of the last Christian graces which it is given to any of us to attain. You find persons kind, generous, devout, who never acquire this difficult virtue of perfect fairness. You respect and love them, and you think you have at last met with a truly admirable character, when some event occurs which wakens up personal feeling, and there is a disclosure of peevishness, want of charity, ignoble narrowness, which saddens or shocks you.

As to the application of my text to communities as well as individuals, it is not too much to say that ecclesiastical history is little more than the record of the attempts of sects and Churches to pull out the mote out of the eyes of those who belong to other sects and Churches, with the most stupendous unconsciousness that there is a beam in their own. And it is when we steadily present to ourselves these rare and crowning virtues of the Gospel, these most precious and delicate fruits of Christ's Spirit; when we think how Christ calls *every* Christian to cultivate

them, that we find ourselves quite unable to say with gaiety of heart, "All these things have I kept from my youth up." We know that we have done no such thing. We remember hard thoughts and uncharitable words and ungenerous acts, for which we thought there was a justification at the moment, but which we are (or, if we are not, ought to be) thoroughly ashamed now. We said, with Jonah, "I do well to be angry;" and we now see that our anger was unreasonable and unworthy.

But this, it will be pleaded, is *so* difficult! The standard of the Sermon on the Mount is too high for us. True, and for the very reason that it *is* a divine standard. You may certainly propose to yourself a low standard if you will; but a low standard means a low and stunted form of character. Difficult it is; in one sense impossible. And therefore we are led to the true and wholesome conviction that we need God's pardon in Christ for the past, and that only His grace can help us even to approximate to that high and faultless goodness which the world pronounces impracticable, but which has been revealed to men in the life of Jesus Christ.

"I have seen (says the Psalmist) an end of all perfection, but Thy commandment is exceeding

broad." Be thankful if God has shown you something of its breadth, and made you ashamed of your own narrowness. Dread to make His commandment narrower than He has made it. Seek His Spirit, so as to be able by individual experience to know the meaning of those other words from the same source, which we shall do well to connect with them, "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart."

XVIII.

BOWING IN THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

2 KINGS v. 18, 19.

"In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace."

IT is a very general complaint of those who consult commentaries, that these enlarge upon the easy passages, while they dismiss the more difficult ones with the scantiest consideration. Such will probably be your experience in turning over expositions of this very curious, and, as I think, instructive incident. Certain writers have supposed that the more obvious interpretation of it would countenance idolatry. Then, instead of asking what the passage means, understood simply and without a theological bias, they have set themselves to consider what it ought to be made to mean. As may be expected, their witness

agreeth not together; and our better course will be to try and forget the special pleading of commentators, and, reading the whole passage in simplicity, endeavour to ascertain its meaning and intention, leaving difficulties to be settled afterwards as best they may.

I need scarcely repeat the engaging narrative of Naaman's recovery from leprosy. When the prophet refused to take any gift from the grateful Syrian, Naaman departed; first, however, making a singular request, and then consulting him on what we should call a point of casuistry. The request he made was that he might be permitted to take two mules' burden of earth from the land of Israel. The only explanation of this odd entreaty seems to be that, very much as the pilgrims to Mecca are said to bring back stones from that sacred spot, the grateful Naaman wished to take away some of the earth of the Holy Land to form or to support an altar for those sacrifices to God which could not properly be offered on the profane earth of the country of Rimmon. If this be so, it shows us that the good Syrian still had unworthy conceptions of Jehovah as a local deity, one who could be worshipped only in his own land, or, if not thus, upon earth brought from that land.

But with this point we are not now concerned. It is the question of casuistry which he submitted to the prophet upon which we are now to fix our attention. He informs Elisha that, as holding a very high rank, and being nearest to the person of the king, he was expected to accompany his master to the idol temple, and that as the king stooped to worship Rimmon while leaning on *his* arm, he was obliged to bend his body as the king bent. He clearly implies that he in no way intended this for worship, and he expresses a humble hope that God will pardon him for this apparent identification of himself with a false worship. Here we have an interesting disclosure of the working of a conscience, scrupulous, yet not over-scrupulous; sensitive, but not morbid. Naaman seems to have been every inch a soldier. He blazed into sudden rage when he thought his country and himself slighted. Then he allowed his servants to calm his anger as suddenly by a few good-humoured and sensible words. Then after his recovery he showed a thankful and generous spirit towards the prophet who had brought him such a blessing.

But he was not so manly as to think he could dispense with a conscience. He did not think that a scruple was necessarily a weakness. True manliness

is closely allied to true simplicity. He could see that there was a difficulty. He looked the difficulty in the face, and sought the solution of it from the man of God. There is no reason to think that his conscience was in the least degree morbid. I should suppose that you and I, under the same circumstances, if God had given us that greatest of all blessings, a truthful conscience, would have felt the same perplexity, and very properly would have sought relief from it.

And I think it is equally plain that from many persons we should get the same kind of answer, as would Naaman if he had consulted the religious Jews of that time. Many would have said, "You must not on any account even enter the house of Rimmon; the very atmosphere is impure; you will certainly be understood to sympathise with idolatry; you had better abstain from the slightest semblance of approval; be the consequences what they may, you are bound to refuse to accompany your master to the house of Rimmon." Such would be the advice certain to have been given by many to Naaman. And similar advice we would be likely to receive in a similar case, at least in this land, in which our Protestantism has wrought into us an

intense dread of idolatry, a dread undoubtedly most healthy and valuable.

But the surprise is that the good Elisha, as zealous surely as anyone could have been for the honour of the true God, does *not* give this advice. Of course a prophet was not always right, and it is quite possible that Elisha may have yielded weakly and improperly. But yet we would prefer to believe that the prophet's decision was recorded for our benefit. That decision was not obscurely conveyed in the words with which he replied to Naaman, "Go in peace." What can this mean but "Do not trouble yourself about this scruple; let your mind be at rest; go on your way with an unvexed spirit; I condemn you not."

It is true that some interpreters try to soften down such difficulties as they discern in the passage by contending that Elisha really did not sanction Naaman's bowing down in the house of Rimmon; that he merely declined to say anything one way or the other; that by the words "go in peace," he meant simply to avóid giving an opinion of any kind. But, with all respect for these pious commentators, I maintain that this does not meet the difficulty. I say, that if his bowing in the

house of Rimmon was an unlawful concession to idolatry, it is a very great difficulty that Elisha should have absolutely avoided, as is alleged, pronouncing a judgment when so ingenuously appealed to. It was his duty, under such circumstances, to pronounce a judgment. He was *bound* to instruct his convert on the point. Even silence, or an ambiguous reply, would have amounted to connivance. A refusal to condemn, from such a man and under such circumstances, was equivalent to a permission. All the glosses of expositors cannot explain away the fact that when the conscientious Naaman expressed a hope that God would pardon him for bending his body in the idol-temple, the holy prophet said not a word to discourage such a hope, but replied in the soothing words, "Go in peace."

The incident is indeed most remarkable, occurring in that sacred record which breathes throughout a spirit of intense aversion to everything idolatrous. It seems obvious surely that Naaman was not guilty in acting as he did, that Elisha advisedly declined to condemn him, and that the incident is put on record as a foreshadowing of a great principle which is only hinted in the Old Testament, but which finds its recognition and development in the gospel of our

Saviour. That principle is toleration, implying lenient judgment of others, readiness to make allowance for individual differences, and reluctance to find sin where the sinful intent cannot be clearly discerned. It is, in other words, reverence for conscience; by which is meant not merely reverence for my *own* conscience, which is often defective and misled, but reverence for other men's consciences also, even when they do not concur in their deliverances with mine.

Doubtless, brethren, our greatest danger in going through this world is indifference to the presence of sin, or unwillingness to deal with it promptly and unsparingly. But there is another danger, much to be avoided, though not perhaps equally perilous, and that is, the disposition to find sin where no sin is, to attribute evil thoughtlessly; as it has been said, to "manufacture" sins where the law of God pronounces no condemnation. This is what the prophet Ezekiel describes as making the hearts of the righteous sad whom God has not made sad. If there be anything we ought to be careful to preserve in our dealings with the consciences of others, it is the due proportion between the greater and the smaller things of religion. To use our Lord's mode of expressing the need of

this proportion, the straining out of gnats is always connected with the swallowing of camels. Treat the important things as important, but let the subordinate things, while they have their place, be subordinate. The moment you lay an undue stress upon minor points of observance, you begin to weaken the sense of high moral and spiritual obligation, and draw persons away from attention to the broad and obvious claims and duties of heartfelt religion. Worry people, and especially young people, with minute scrupulosities and vexing casuistries, and inevitably you impair their quick sense of right and wrong; you induce what divines call antinomianism, *i.e.* the disposition to substitute for true obedience adherence to certain opinions, or zeal for certain observances.

Two simple and brief rules I would venture to propose, in connection with this subject. Judge yourself strictly. Judge others leniently. Judge yourself strictly, for this reason, that whereas your bias will always be severity towards others, it will as certainly be over-indulgence towards yourself. Observe, however, that a strict conscience does not mean a sickly, a morbidly sensitive conscience. Beware of living in a state of chronic vexation, wherein

conscience is irritated by a host of little insignificant teasing scruples. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," and there is great danger of leaving the soul under the incessant fret of tiny doubts and distrusts. Face once for all these annoying scrupulosities; settle them once for all in the light of God's commandments. You have quite enough to do in ruling your life by the weightier precepts of His law, without spending your time on microscopic difficulties. But then as to these weightier precepts, be strict in your judgment of self. There is in most men, though, I fully admit, not in all, an overbalance of self-esteem, which makes it always safe to lean to the side of strictness. Only thus, by throwing the weight on the side of unsparing self-inquiry, can we trim the vessel, which is prone to lean too far on the other side through the pressure of self-love. Within every one of us there is an advocate for self, whose appeals we must receive with a wary reserve. Our heart's desire should be, "let God be true and every man a liar;" "let me know at any cost what I am and wherein I am astray; save me from over-tenderness towards my own weaknesses, and toleration of my own sins; enable me to walk in the light, as God is in the light, cleansed by the blood of Christ from all sin."

And, lastly, as you judge yourself strictly, so judge others leniently. Your bias, remember, in regard to others, is towards over-severity. Do not pronounce an act to be sinful if it may possibly be lawful. Have you all the circumstances under your eye, without which a clear decision is unattainable? Do you know all the secret springs of action which prompt the conduct of your fellow-men? Naaman himself did not think that to stoop when his master stooped in the house of Rimmon, since it was not intended as an act of worship, was necessarily a sin; and the prophet, more charitable than many of us would have been, refused to pronounce it a sin. You may say, "that would have been a sin in me;" granted, but it is too great a leap to infer, "*therefore* it must be a sin in everyone else." There is no sequence here. Your conscience is supreme for you, but not for another. A conscience claiming infallibility is quite as irrational as a Pope claiming it, yet submission to an infallible conscience is claimed by many; though as a matter of fact it is invariably their own conscience, and not anyone else's, which they thus enthrone.

If you would test the soundness of the distinctions I am attempting to make, turn to the 14th

of Romans, where you have, explicitly treated, the doctrine which pervades the whole New Testament. He who cannot read there the assertion of the sacredness of the individual conscience must be blind indeed; the sacredness of my conscience to me, not because it appertains to my sinful self, but because it is God-implanted, and because through it His Spirit communes with my spirit; but observe, brethren, the sacredness of other men's consciences also, because God has implanted them, and because through them His Spirit also truly speaks. It is a solemn thing to feel that God has dealings with us all in our heart of hearts. This makes it a terrible risk to make light of conviction, for to resist a conviction is to strive with our Maker. And how forbearing and hopeful should it render us to others, with whom we believe that God has also dealings; dealings which we may not always hope to understand, and which therefore we should observe with trustful reverence, and not visit with hasty and short-sighted condemnation.

XIX.

FAITH RECKONED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

ROMANS iv. 3.

"For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

THIS passage from the book of Genesis was manifestly felt to be an important one by the great apostle, for it is introduced in the third chapter of the Galatians with very much the same purpose as it is here. And undoubtedly it does furnish us with a clue to the right understanding of the doctrine of justification through faith alone, which St. Paul is enforcing in both places. It is impossible to deny that somehow or other this doctrine has fallen into disfavour in these days, and equally impossible to deny that this must be due to something incorrect or insufficient in the manner of enforcing it. It sounds dry and technical, the symbol of a controversy which has lost its interest. We hear sermons about justification by faith, and we observe that one

is exactly like another. The continual repetition of the same formulas becomes monotonous and stupefying. We go to church to receive help and encouragement in our spiritual life, and then we hear some generalities about faith and "coming to Christ" and free grace, which do not touch our consciences in the slightest degree, and which we have heard a thousand times over.

Now it seems strange that the doctrine to the defence of which St. Paul devoted a life-time; the doctrine by the proclamation of which Luther shook the whole continent of Europe; the doctrine which awakened those spiritual experiences which John Bunyan embodied in his immortal book; the doctrine which, on the lips of Wesley and Whitefield, stirred the masses of the English people to the very depths of their souls; the doctrine which entitled the Evangelical party in the Church of England to the gratitude of all Englishmen, Churchmen, and Christians, even though the decline of that party has been so swift and so portentous; it is, I say, strange that this doctrine should seem to have so completely lost its power, and should have come to be regarded as an exploded theological dogma with which earnest people need not trouble their heads. Is it not reasonable to

suspect that the fault and failure lies not in the doctrine itself, but in the altogether unworthy, illogical, and cramped way in which the doctrine has been expounded?

And I suppose that the imperfection in the statement of it which has offended and alienated reflecting persons is this, that it seems to bring fiction into the region of religion. If there be a region in which fiction can have no place, it is that of spiritual truth, and if there be a moment in a man's life when fiction is beyond all expression shocking and perilous, it is the moment of that great crisis when, brought face to face with the Unseen, he resolves to reconsider his soul's relation to the Being against whom he has sinned, when God will "lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow every hiding-place." He who is infinite Truth must see every living person exactly as he is. He cannot suppose a person to be righteous who is unrighteous. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart;" and to Him the heart appears neither better nor worse, holier nor more sinful, than as a matter of fact it is.

Now it is not admitted here even for an instant that justification through faith rightly understood does involve any fiction whatever. But must we not apprehend that as it is popularly preached it does allow the introduction of fiction, and represent God as contemplating the souls He has made in an unreal and illusory way? For example, St. Paul says, "God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Now if a preacher were to insinuate from this that God regarded His holy and perfectly obedient Son as unholy and disobedient, he would be not only misconceiving St. Paul's teaching, but introducing the painful and impious notion that God, although infinitely truthful, could think the Holy Jesus sinful when He was sinless. And this would of course be the most revolting and unendurable of fictions.

In like manner, religious teachers sometimes affirm that at His crucifixion the Saviour "bore the wrath of God." Though such a statement is not sustained by Scripture, yet there may possibly be a defensible meaning attached to it; but one thing it cannot mean with any regard for sense or Scripture. It cannot be so understood as to imply that there ever was a moment at which God did not look with absolute

complacency on the righteousness of Jesus; at which the feeling of His fatherly heart could have expressed itself at variance with the words, "In Thee I am well pleased;" at which He regarded Him who was "obedient unto death" as disobedient. The idea is in truth almost too painful to put into words. It involves a shocking fiction, but nevertheless one which unquestionably taints the doctrine of "substitution," as popularly presented.

Again it is said that "we are made the righteousness of God in Him." Now that statement is often quoted as if, when God sees the believer in Christ, He is not aware of his sins, or does not observe them, or shuts His eyes to them. But it cannot mean this, for God, being infinitely true, being the heart-searcher, must see us exactly as we are. To say indeed that in His love and pity, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," He condemns us not as sinners, giving us eternal life as a gift, and accepting us for Christ's sake; this is not only perfectly intelligible, but strictly scriptural. But that He can think us righteous when in point of fact we are not righteous is a conception as demoralising as to the devout mind it is distressing. When justification through faith

is associated with these dishonouring fictions, it is scarcely surprising that it should have lost its hold upon serious minds.

But now, reverting to the words before us, I am anxious to show you that they involve no fiction, and why they involve none. First, however, let me state wherein the essence of justification through Christ, as I understand it, consists. When the first awakening of spiritual life in the soul occurs is it possible for the man to have then and there any reasonable sense of acceptance, and if so, on what is it grounded? Observe, there has been no time for acts or performances. We are speaking of the moment before any action is possible upon which the sinner can found his hope. In that moment the only fact patent to the sinner is that he *is* a sinner, and therefore that he can find nothing whatever in his past life to establish a claim to divine favour.

Can he then in that moment possess a reasonable sense of acceptance? May he at once entertain a rational conviction that he is forgiven? or is he to understand that he must wait for such acceptance and forgiveness until certain acts are performed? Is it possible for him at that particular point of time to say, "I *am* forgiven," or must he take

this lower ground, "*if* I do this, and *if* I do that, and *if* I fulfil the other precept, and *if* I avail myself of this ordinance, and *if* I cultivate that disposition, why *then* I may hope that God may be brought round to look on me with favour, and *then* I may feel that I am accepted and forgiven." Now justification through faith, as I understand it, means simply that in such a moment, before a single act, mental or external, is performed, it is possible for the sinner to say, I *am* accepted, I *am* forgiven. I may begin my Christian life, not with the feeling that I have to prevail upon God to love me, to induce Him to pardon me, but with the joyful assurance that He does love me, that He has pardoned me, that I may go on my way rejoicing, as His ransomed and reconciled child. Take justification through faith in this sense, and you cannot be surprised if Luther spoke of it as the "article of a standing or falling Church." Why, take it thus, and it is identical with Christianity itself.

But, keeping in view what has been just said, let me invite you to turn again to the words of my text. God spake to Abraham, and Abraham trusted the word that God had spoken, and God then and there, before Abraham did any acts, and (as St. Paul is

careful to point out) before he was circumcised, accepted his faith or trust instead of righteousness. Now that does not mean that to God Abraham appeared to be righteous. He must have seen him exactly as he was, and inasmuch as Abraham at that moment was not a righteous man, God did not think him, and having regard to reality could not think him, so. But, you may rejoin, was there not something of fiction in that? How could God take his faith in lieu of righteousness? I am strongly persuaded that if you understand what faith, or (adopting the far more satisfactory word) trust, really is, you will see that this involved no fiction whatsoever.

You will perceive this, if you recollect that it is of the very nature of faith at once to open communications between the soul and the source of righteousness. When I trust the Lord of my life, the life that is in Him, in a very real sense, becomes mine. As long as my sin and distrust choked the channels of communication between myself and the Being from whom my "fresh springs" of righteousness flow, my soul remained parched, withered, unfruitful; but the moment I learn to trust, the fulness of grace becomes mine; the cleansing and reviving tide of that righteousness which is of God floods

my soul to its utmost capacity. St. Paul elsewhere uses the bold phrase that Christians are "filled with all the fulness of God." I do not pretend to understand all that is involved in such words, but I am now pointing out that they become applicable to any man who comes to God as a sinner, who knows himself to be unrighteous, who has learned to say, "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" in myself I find no ground of hope, no warrant for self-satisfaction; but Thou art good and loving and righteous; on Thee I build my hope; in Thy character I find my deliverance from despair; in Thy faithfulness I have a footing, "though the hills be removed and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea;" in Thy dealings with men through Thy well-beloved Son, and in the salvation which He wrought out, I become once more a man of hope; I feel that an inexhaustible spring of righteousness is opened to me; "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

"Thou of Life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee,
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity."

Now if I am warranted in affirming that simple faith or trust antecedently to acts of any kind what-

soever, involves all this; if to effect this be the special and exclusive function of faith; then it is by no means a fiction to conceive of God, when any man trusts Him, as counting such trust for righteousness. It is no fiction to say that God's righteousness becomes his righteousness. And it is no fiction, because furthermore the very existence of faith or trust, although antecedent to any acts whatsoever, carries with it the promise and germ of obedience. It is no fiction to look on the seed as containing within it the future plant. There is no fiction, when a sinner places his trust in One who can make him holy, in saying, "Here is incipient obedience." It will not do to say that faith may be inoperative. Faith is *never* inoperative. You never really believe anything without such belief's producing its proper result. Of course if the faith ceases to be exercised, the results are not found; but as long as the faith is there, the result is germinally in the faith.

The reason why you aver that faith may be inoperative is that you mistake a passive acquiescence in Christianity, or a mere sense of excitement, or an employment of the mind upon orthodoxy for faith; and then, observing that vast numbers possess these without manifesting any Christian results worth

speaking of, you assume that faith, in the Scriptural sense of the word, can be inoperative. Scriptural faith; faith meaning trust in a righteous Father and loving Redeemer—*never*. The notion is merely preposterous and self-contradictory. A trust in the Righteous One not making him who trusts righteous is as absurd as it is impious. Our own twelfth Article rules it much more truly and accurately when it sets forth that "good works do spring out *necessarily* of a true faith."

And observe that in saying this we are not magnifying the faith, but the object of the faith. When we ascribe this transcendent power to faith, we are not in truth setting it above love or hope or self-sacrifice or any other right feeling. We do not say that it is *better* than these; we say that its value consists simply in its putting us into communication with an infinite righteousness. When I open the window and draw in the life-giving breath of spring, or when I raise the cup of water to my thirsty lips, or when I seize the rope that is flung to me when I am drowning, I do not think of the hand which I move, but of the delicious air, of the reviving water, of the firm grasp at the other end of the rope. In any true exercise of trust, the trust is not

thought of, but Him on whom we trust. Self vanishes; God is all in all. An old poet wrote that

> "Unless above himself he can
> Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!"[1]

Is it not so, my brethren? The philosopher said, "Give me a standing ground outside the world, and I will lift the world." The cry of all struggling souls is, "Give me that outside myself, by which I can lift myself above self, and all will be well."

If those who leave us no trust in a righteousness high as the heaven is above the earth, think that they possess this, let them disclose it. But until they do, I must be excused for resting upon that which I feel sure *can* lift me above myself, because it *has* lifted me above myself whenever I have thrown upon it the full weight of my helplessness and ignorance and sinking of heart. That something outside and above self is God; God approaching and rescuing me, drawing me in the Crucified One "with bands of a man and cords of love;" God lifting me above my own helpless and sinful self by the might of His pure Spirit.

[1] Daniel.

XX.

THE EARTH PERMANENT, MAN TRANSITORY.

ECCLESIASTES i. 4.

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever."

WHATEVER may be thought of the meaning of a passage here or there in this book of Ecclesiastes, it must be obvious to every attentive reader that its pervading tone is less hopeful and more depressed, not only than the New Testament, but than the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament. There is in it a strain of disgust with life, of bitter disappointment with those pursuits for which men care most. Certain it is that we must, as it were, supplement its statements with those of the Gospel, and accept those statements as only one side of the truth which in its comprehensiveness lies before the Christian. This need not, however, prevent us, who have the whole of that truth under our view, from

taking advantage of such a passage as my text, which is surely a very opportune subject for reflection at the outset of a new year.[1]

Permanence, then, characterises the material world, while man, viewing him apart from his immortal hopes, lives a mere transitory life. There is, indeed, a sense in which even the material world suffers change. Of all outward things none are so associated with our conceptions of durability as "the everlasting hills," and when we try to recall far distant ages we find our greatest help in remembering that upon the same hills, with precisely the same form and colour, the men of those remote ages gazed. And yet we know that the hills, in scientific strictness, are not everlasting: that rain and sun and storm are leaving their traces upon the scarred and seamed precipices, and that what the globe is at the present moment is the result of agencies irresistible and unceasing, though carried on through periods of time quite inconceivable. Strictly speaking, nature is never at rest; through all being mighty forces are at work, rendering change and advance the law of the universe.

But the writer of Ecclesiastes is not viewing the

[1] Preached on New Year's Day.

world from a scientific, but from a practical point of view. Everlasting indeed is the material world in relation to the sixty, seventy, or eighty years allotted to human beings. And what makes the permanence of the material world as compared with the briefness of human life so oppressive is this: that man, thus hemmed in by outward limitations, compelled to do all which his hand finds to do within quite a moment of time, is yet conscious of views, feelings, longings, immeasurably too large for a creature whose life here is evanescent. What would have been the use of calling into existence a creature with immense capacities, with thoughts reaching far beyond this lower world, with strange drawings towards infinite perfection, with a passion for what is real and enduring, yet doomed to have experience of these for a little space here, and then to have them quenched for ever in the horrible pit? That were to attribute mere cruelty to the Creator of man, and we never can vindicate the goodness of the Almighty One unless we allow that man, fitted for immortality, *is* indeed immortal; that these aspirations were not awakened to be disappointed, but rather to find their amplest satisfaction in that presence in which is "fulness of joy," at that right hand where there are "pleasures for evermore.

There is no imputation upon the loving kindness of the Creator in the fact that He has created, let us say, a may-fly to be born in the morning and to die in the afternoon. It has no anticipation of a future. It dances out its little life in the sunlight, and when it dies we may perhaps say that there has been a larger preponderance of happiness in that life than in those of other beings who do not perish so quickly. There is nothing startling in the fact that to a fly is assigned only the life of a fly. But even a slight investigation of man's nature and thoughts and feelings, will evidence that for the due unfolding of that nature, his existence here is far too contracted, and that for the satisfaction of his thoughts and feelings he needs a life widely different from, and far less restricted than, that allowed him on this globe. Am I putting contempt on the present life? Far from it. It is good, but yet as connected with another and higher life. It is bright with a light thrown back upon it from immortality. But view it without reference to that life. Withdraw the radiance which everlasting hopes throw around it; think of it as the kindling of ideas which are merely to be quenched; of cravings which are never to be satisfied; of high anticipations which never, never are

to be fulfilled; and then must you not allow that this being, so strangely constituted, walking in a vain shadow and disquieting himself in vain, is really worse off than the may-fly, and that his existence is absolutely irreconcilable with faith in a wise and good Creator?

I know not what amount of evidence would satisfy me, if I saw a bird of newly-discovered species with powerful wings, that it never was intended to fly and never in fact did fly. That it was capable of flying would to me be conclusive proof that it was intended to do so; and by analogy the existence of faculties and capacities unnecessary for a brief life here, out of proportion with such a life, and demanding eternity for their exercise, would convince me that man was made for immortality, and that his troubled and sin-stained life here was but the prelude to an endless existence, untroubled and unstained, under the eye of Him who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.

What I have had in view in these observations is that the painful sense of the transiency of our life compared with the permanence of the material world, is an evidence for that truth which the sacred writer recognised imperfectly if at all, the immortality of man.

I own that I could see no reasonableness in urging the truth contained in my text, if I were unable to supplement it with this latter truth. What call would there be to meditate on the brevity of my life here, if it was not to be followed by another with which it is connected in a very momentous way? Who, by taking thought, can add a single moment of time to his life? Then if this existence be all, let us give up taking thought; instead of dwelling on its brevity, let us try to make the best of it, to forget that it is short, to crowd into it as much enjoyment as possible. Let me not be misconceived. The creed of the Epicurean is odious and degrading; but the question is, Is it not the legitimate inference from a denial of man's immortality? If we be upon the same spiritual level as the brute that perisheth, is there not an end of faith, and hope, and unselfish devotion to duty, and the sacrifice of ourselves for the well-being of others? If man's death is but as the death of an animal, how can his life be anything more than an animal life?

But once accept the thought that his existence here is but a brief introduction to a diviner existence and while you ennoble this life, you make it a reasonable

thing to dwell on its transiency, not to suggest merely lugubrious thoughts, nor to inspire an unpractical dejection of feeling, but because, short as it is, it is the seedtime of immortality, and because into this little space assigned us here below are crowded duties, responsibilities, opportunities, having the most intimate relation to our undying life beyond the grave. "One generation passeth away and another cometh." There is something within us which makes it difficult to conceive this in its simple truth. We walk through the streets of London, and looking into the faces of the thousands who meet us, we can to some extent feel that they are human beings like ourselves, "fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter." But they are not more human, not more capable of joy and grief, not endowed with a more wondrous personality, than the men who hurried through the streets of Corinth or Rome long centuries since: yet *they* have all gone down to the dust, and perhaps after centuries men will think of London as we think of the cities of the past.

Only by thought and training do we lay hold of the fact that the men of the past were not shadows,

but men of flesh and blood, over whose hearts swept as strong gusts of feeling as over ours, who were as tremblingly alive to every thrill of pleasure or of pain, for whom life had as intense an interest, and death as deep a gloom. We learn the same lesson by watching the march of events in our own time. The greatest event of modern days, the French Revolution, began not more than eighty-six years ago, but only the very few indeed who are completing a hundred years of life can speak of it as a fact of their own experience, or even as a dim reminiscence of their childhood. Yet when we were children it was fresh in the memories of not a few. In five years scarcely one will live to recollect it, and in ten years it will have passed beyond human memory. That what we call the past was once the present, and as real a present as that in which we now exist, requires some mental effort fully to apprehend.

And that when *we* are called away, there will be others dwelling in *their* present, millions having life strong within them; that the sun will shine as brightly, and the birds sing as cheerily, and the sea roll its waves as majestically to the shore, and that in cities men will hurry as eagerly to their business, and that the noise and chatter of the world

will be as loud as ever, this we are slow to recollect. Nor, as I have said, would there be any use in recollecting it, unless we could recollect also that beneath the changing lies the unchanging, that the world into which we are to pass is not a cloudland or a region of dreams, but a world even more real than ours, and that while "our earthly house of this tabernacle" is to be dissolved, removed even as a shepherd's tent, we have "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

I am aware that those who have no trust that we shall live hereafter speak nevertheless of a continuity which belongs to the human race, and remind us truly enough that though the individual passes away, the race continues, and moves forward to a better destiny; and that even if we as individuals are to be blotted out from God's universe, we ought to work with energy in the faith that posterity will be blessed by our efforts, when we are ourselves forgotten. There is doubtless an element of truth in this, and also an element of disinterestedness which is valuable; but after all we shrink from the thought of being forgotten. Still more, there is surely something unspeakably dreary in the prospect, when we have striven hard for others, of passing into nothingness,

and missing the result of our strivings.[1] It is not in human nature to rouse itself to energy under such an absence or feebleness of motive. It is not alone the thought of being forgotten. An unselfish man, though he might be better pleased to be remembered, will bear even being forgotten if he may have some assurance that his labour is not in vain in the Lord; but to work without this assurance were dismal indeed—we may well say impossible. To work and *wait* is the lot of the Christian. To work without having anything to wait for,—this is the lot of the man who, however filled with enthusiasm for the good of his fellow men, knows well that he will never witness the consummation for which he works and longs. It is small consolation to us

[1] "Men who live for one world or two have high motives of virtue in common; the noble self-respect which impels them to the life they feel worthy of them; the love of goodness for its own sake and for its immediate results; and beyond this, the desire to do good that shall still survive the doer, who will not indeed be in the land of the living to see his work, but who can yet discount his expectations into some measure of present satisfaction. . . . Yet he who believes that his thread of life will be severed once and for ever by the fatal shears, well knows that he wants a purpose and a joy in life which belongs to him who looks for a life to come. . . . Few men feel real contentment in the expectation of vanishing out of conscious existence; henceforth, like the great Buddha, to exist only in their work. To remain incarnate in the memory of friends is something. . . ."—Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii. p. 97.

that the material earth abideth for ever, if the things we care for most are daily passing away, and we and they are hurrying to annihilation. Take away the immortality of man, and the continuity of the race is practically an unreality. It is not this poor negation which has done such mighty things in the world. Men have lived self-sacrificing and beneficent lives because they have had faith in an eternal world in which every deed honestly done for God and their fellow-creatures would have its effect, and in which they would be permitted to see the headstone brought forth with shoutings, and placed on the fabric of a reconstituted humanity.

Choosing the passage before us as the subject of a sermon on the first day of the New Year, I would dwell on the transiency of this life, not to depress, but to awake you to a profounder conviction of the value of the present moment, of the greatness of the issues which must be determined within this short life, by vast numbers so grievously misemployed, by vast numbers so utterly frittered away. There is a strain by indulging in which God's ministers, speaking as dying men to dying men, may merely paralyse effort, but the shortness of life ought always to be so put as to awaken and

not to paralyse effort. We are to "number our days," not so as to embitter life by the thought how few they are, but so as to "apply our hearts unto wisdom." Much indeed that is said about the shortness of life is sadly unpractical. We bring forward the old conventional phrases when we lose a friend, or go to a funeral; but when we leave the sick chamber or turn from the grave, we find the world going on its way as resolutely as ever, and we go along with it.

Perhaps it is best to think much more of life than of death, much more of living unto God without a moment's delay, than of conjuring up anticipations of our last moments. It is a very suggestive observation that there is comparatively little in the New Testament about death. Life, the new life in Christ, so glorious as to make the dissolution of the body comparatively unimportant—this was the thought which filled the foreground of the Christian prospect. The apostles appealed to Christian men not so much on the ground that they would die, as on the ground that they were already dead, "dead unto sin," and that their life was "hid with Christ in God." Those elaborate methods of preparation for death which are found in some devotional books are

surely somewhat out of harmony with the tone of the New Testament. One of the noblest poems in the English language is "An Elegy in a Country Churchyard," but it is not a poem that breathes any immortal hopes, or rouses to Christian energy. It is beautiful and touching, but it expresses only part of the truth about death. Its strain, indeed, is not unlike that of the book from which my text is taken, in which death is viewed apart from that bright hope which Christ by His death and rising again awakened in human hearts.

Dwell, then, on the thought of death mainly as a motive to newness of life. The commencement of a year is a memento to us that one generation is passing away and another coming. There are other mementoes which God often sends. He sends the failing health, the waning strength, the disappointment of life's most cherished hopes, the gathering of clouds round the eventide of life. Thus God often painfully reminds us how time is passing. But in the departure of one year, and the commencement of another, He sends us a memento which finds us in our health and strength, and He invites us to His service at a time when we can give ourselves to Him deliberately and before our

best days are quite gone; when we may devote to Him something besides the miserable remainder of a sinful life. Let our offering of ourselves be then a deliberate act. There is a passage of Scripture which says—"He that believeth shall not make haste." It is an utterly irreligious notion that we can huddle up our spiritual affairs at the very moment when the summons has arrived to go hence and be no more seen. True religion is not the putting ourselves right by some clever expedient which enables us to combine a worthless life with a Christian's death. It is the making the *life* right. It is the regarding our existence here as an anticipation of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. The one condition of a Christian death is a Christian life. We may doubtless cast ourselves upon the indefinite hope that God's mercy may possibly follow on a late repentance. All that can be said is, that we must not deny its possibility. But if a man has walked with God in life, we need no record of his demeanour in his last moments to convince us that God will walk with him through the valley of the shadow of death. The few hours during which decay and death are doing their worst will not separate him from the love of Christ. We know

what his life has been, and *that*, far more truly than any strong manifestations of feeling at the last; will assure us that he has passed to a nobler life, into the presence of Him whom by faith He had followed here.

XXI.

THINGS SACRED AND THINGS SECULAR.

COLOSSIANS iii. 17.

"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."

IT is one of the most incalculably precious effects of Christian faith that it gives interest and dignity to the common-place existence of common-place people. Think for a moment how it would bear upon the lives of the toilers, obscure and insignificant, who in Ephesus, or Corinth, or Rome, listened to a proclamation which, they were told, was especially addressed to them. The poor artisan or labourer, the peasant, the soldier, the slave, would learn the astonishing truth that God, the Infinite One, cared for him, and designed him for a glorious destiny, and had disclosed a marvellous purpose of rescuing him from his degradation, and setting him at His right hand. The very moment he believed

this, life would become new. He would be no longer a woe-begone creature of a day, stumbling painfully through an existence of a few years, very few and yet very weary. He would no longer find the utmost of his hopes in barely escaping starvation, wearing out soul and body in the attempt to secure a crust and a shelter. When he believed in Christ, all outward circumstances would indeed be unchanged; but the very conception of life would be different. It would be God's discipline of His child for glory. It would be the vestibule of heaven. Its frets and griefs would be incidents in a grand method for finding out the heir of immortality, and leading him to his glorious inheritance. None would feel himself insignificant. He would walk through the world as God's child, caring little whether it noticed or forgot him, because he felt that the Divine Love was set upon him, that he was compassed with a great crowd of witnesses, that life was ordered in its smallest details by Divine forethought.

I say that Christianity is the most incalculable blessing in this respect, if in no other, that it redeems life from its infinite insignificance, and gives a meaning, a purpose, a transcendent interest to the ordinary lives of very ordinary people; and

that he who by robbing men of faith in a Father and a future, deprives them of the only conviction which makes life endurable to the majority of mankind, is no true friend to his race, and certainly is no true promoter of its advancement. It is through Christ that life is worthy the name of life. It is "in the name of the Lord Jesus" that we are to do our everyday work, drudging and monotonous and mean though that work may be. There is no part of our existence which is not touched by Christ's grace; there is no irksome routine on the one hand, or unexpected trial on the other, which does not form part of His gracious dealings with His loved ones.

Now, I ask you to notice that in the mind of a primitive Christian, when for the first time the relation of Christ to Himself was disclosed, no such distinction would exist as that between things secular and things sacred, with which unfortunately we are too familiar. It is a distinction which has wrought unspeakable mischief. We know in a general way what it means. Clergymen, who visit the sick, and read prayers, and preach sermons, are, it is thought, engaged in a "sacred work," and theirs is a "sacred" office. Barristers and doctors, merchants, and shopkeepers,

and of course all who labour with their hands,—these, we think, have a "secular calling." Now, observe the working of this notion. Clergymen have a sacred work, therefore they are to be exceptionally holy. Laymen have a secular work, therefore they may be secular. There must then be one rule of life for the person in Holy Orders, and another for the man who has not received a religious vocation. The monk or the nun is a "religious;" if any be not a priest or a monk or a nun, that person need not be *so* religious. It is a detestable, an irreligious distinction, and I heartily wish the phraseology which perpetuates it were disused once for all.

Let me say briefly why it is untrue, unchristian, and mischievous. First, as I have just hinted, it is a distinction which would have been utterly foreign to the mind of an early Christian, and is quite opposed to the spirit of the New Testament. Christ, therein revealed, has laid hold upon the *whole* of life. He consecrated what we call secular employments by Himself engaging in them, and He is present in His people to aid and to bless when they are about their daily work. His grace is as really needed to perform that work as to preach the Gospel, or to

administer the Sacraments. To eat and drink are acts most intimately connected with our bodily nature—acts in doing which we conform to the life of the animals below us—yet it is possible, nay, it is our duty, to do them to the glory of God, and in the name of Christ. The Gospel, which teaches us that the grace of Christ must pervade every part of our life, knows no distinction of secular and sacred. All is sacred, for all can be done in the name of Christ.

Again, this distinction of sacred and secular is bad, because it vanishes on nearer observation. We find that it is perfectly impossible to draw a sharp line. Art, science, politics, business, every-day duty, instead of being altogether detached from religion, have such intimate relations with it that they are, or may be and ought to be, themselves essentially religious. It is a mere arbitrary and misleading distinction. To preach a sermon is a sacred act. But then if a painter, in the most devout spirit, paints a picture on a religious subject, is that sacred or secular? A bad sermon on the text "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" is (it would seem) sacred, but to paint the well-known picture illustrating the same text, was secular. To write hymns is a sacred work. Then was it a

sacred or a secular work we ask, to write "Paradise Lost?" If it was a sacred work, then was it secular to write Wordsworth's "Excursion" or Cowper's "Task?" Surely too we must feel that all really great music is most truly religious.

Again, is it a sacred or a secular work when a young girl, under a deep sense of duty, consecrates her life to attendance upon a suffering mother? We need not hesitate to speak of it as in the very highest degree a sacred work. Yet not more sacred than any honest self-denial, encountered from a pure and devout motive. Again, and contrariwise, consider what are generally classed as sacred works — praying, preaching, administering sacraments, visiting the sick. How intensely secular they may become! How mean and perfunctory the spirit in which they may be performed! How easily may their motive come to be that so well expressed in Bible words—"Put me into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread!"

Even where the minister of Christ is perfectly conscientious, the routine of religious duties is apt to engender a mechanical and formal habit of mind. You little know how trying it is to clergymen to

be bound to read solemn words, to speak on the most solemn subjects; above all, to stand by the beds of the dying and say just the true and right and real thing, no matter what their mood may be; no matter what other claims of duty have to be met; no matter whether their health be good or bad, their light of life strong or low, their spirits high or depressed, their devotional feeling active or feeble. Oh, it is expecting too much from flesh and blood! You must not insist on their being always bright and vigorous, interesting and earnest. Such unvarying intensity is simply impossible. Do you suppose a clergyman can read, as some do, the same prayers of the Church of England three hundred and sixty-five times in a year, and escape the danger of doing this mechanically? Given the quickening spirit within, and the things called secular become in the highest degree sacred. Take away the life and soul of devotion, and religious exercises and avocations become painfully dry and secular.

But, in fact, I object to this distinction between things sacred and things secular, because it is radically *irreligious*. It implies, first, that all things are not of God. Churches are, but not the houses

we live in. Clergymen are, but not men of other professions or employments. Sunday is, but not the other six days. Now, as I understand it, Christ claimed the world for Himself and His Father in the sense that He claimed *everything in the world.* Factories and railways, camps and courts of law, mansions, museums, and picture-galleries, to say nothing of the world of trees, and rivers, and birds, and flowers, form part of that world which belongs to Him, the Heir of all things. This is the only religious view of life; any attempt to label certain actions as religious, and others as secular, is merely infidel; it tends to make all *irreligious.*

For example it might at first sight seem to conduce to piety to encourage an exaggerated conception of the sacredness of priests, by styling their office religious, and all others secular. Experience has shown that it has had precisely the opposite effect. First, it did not in the long run make the clergy holier; and next, beyond a doubt, it made the laity secular in the very worst sense. Priests were to be surrounded with a halo. It was not simply that they were to be holy. It was not that there were to be, as there are, additional *motives* to holiness

in the case of the minister of Christ. It was that his was to be *another* holiness. He was to walk by another rule. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount were not high enough to be his standard, or if they were, then the laity must have some lower rule.

The result was that this unnatural and untruthful conception engendered quite a new class of faults in the priest, spiritual arrogance, ecclesiastical inhumanity, ruthless enmity to dissentients; while it did not save him from the meanest, vulgarest, most depraved tendencies of the laity. At the very time when ecclesiastical pretension was at its highest, there were vices rife among the clergy heinous beyond expression. And since the Reformation, when this false conception was rudely shattered, the clergy have certainly not led less reputable or exemplary lives. It is idle to say that this notion was doctrinally incorrect. As a matter of fact, it was accepted and encouraged. The clergy accepted it because it seemed to magnify their office and themselves; the laity accepted it because it favoured the convenient doctrine that they might be satisfied with a lower standard, and because it induced the idea of a kind of vicarious religion, in which the holiness of priests

could be treated as a set-off to the shortcomings of lay people.

And this was by no means so illogical after all. It surely does seem an inevitable inference that if clergymen are to be more holy, laymen may be *less* holy, and that therefore there must be two standards, one for the priest, the other for the people. This is at once sound logic and common-sense. And, at all events, is it not quite certain that this doctrine is sure to be thus interpreted? Nothing will guard against it but the inculcation, in season and out of season, of the supreme command, fastening itself in all its awful stringency upon every Christian man, "be ye holy, for I am holy." We must call upon men to produce the two standards, the priest's and the layman's; or, if they cannot do so, we must insist that the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount, and that commandment of Christ which is so "exceeding broad," summon them, laymen though they be, to thorough conformity, by God's grace, to the perfect will of a holy God and Father, jealous just because He *is* fatherly.

Seek, then, brethren, to make your *whole* life religious. Think not that you can partition off

certain acts and certain times as sacred, while other acts and times are secular. Religion must interpenetrate the whole life, or it is not the religion to which my text points. What act can you specify in the doing of which you are independent of the grace of Christ, or withdrawn from His presence, or untouched by His claim to your obedience? Into His holy name you were baptised, and your whole life was solemnly marked off as belonging to Him. It is a sacred thing, and you are consecrated persons. "Saint" is your title, whether you justify it or not by your lives. Pure religion is when the sense of God's love, of the vastness of His claims, of the breadth of His commandment, so works through the life as to make it one organic whole, and when the poor, unworthy, unreal distinction of secular and sacred is forgotten; when what is most religious is most human, and what is commonest is ennobled and purified by the grace which flows from "Christ our Life."

XXII.

THE MORAL LAW AND THE STARRY HEAVENS.

PSALM xix. 1.

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handywork."

THIS is one of the psalms, few in number, which later commentators clearly recognise as, in part at least, the work of David. I say in part, because it is conjectured that the portion following the seventh verse was written at a later time, and joined by a compiler to the earlier verses. Whoever that compiler may have been, he showed wonderful spiritual discernment, for certainly the two portions, the one relating to the material heavens, and the other to the law of God, do very admirably connect themselves together and form one sacred song of singular beauty. It is interesting to compare this psalm with another, which is also undoubtedly the work of David, viz., the eighth Psalm. You find in both a profound sense of the

grandeur of the heavens, and you can easily understand how David, the shepherd boy, keeping his flocks under the open sky, and looking through the clear air of the East to the moon and stars, would with his deeply religious mind learn a lesson of God's greatness and glory which he would never forget.

It is surely a cause of gratitude that the Psalms dwell so repeatedly on the beauties of nature, and for this reason, that the New Testament is mostly silent respecting them. We can easily see the cause of this. To the New Testament writers the newly unfolded glories of the Kingdom of Heaven were everything. "The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" threw all natural glories into shadow. And if there had been no part of sacred Scripture which was eloquent respecting the lovely and grand things of this earth, we might have fancied that it was sinful to have a keen appreciation of delightful scenery, or of the order, wisdom, and beauty of nature. But we need be under no such apprehension while we possess the Book of Psalms. There the lover of nature will have his longing for the beautiful satisfied; no, I will not use a word which sounds somewhat selfish; not "satisfied," but *consecrated*, connected, as it always should be, with faith in a great and good

God, treated as a means of making us religious in the highest and most spiritual sense.

It must be confessed that there are not a few good Christians upon whom the glories of heaven and earth are in great part thrown away, prosaic and unimaginative, reverential no doubt in listening to God's voice in His word written, but utterly incapable of hearing it in His works. We judge them not. If God has withheld from them a sense of the beautiful, He certainly will not condemn them for failing to exercise it. But we have a right to turn to the Book of Psalms as evidence that the highest order of mind, and the most deeply religious, is that which is most alive to the loveliness of nature, and to the revelation of God in His works. It is an unhealthy religion which seeks to exalt grace by despising nature, even as it is an irreligious spirit which would keep out of sight the God of nature, or forget that the order of the universe originates with a God of order.

"Two things" (said the great thinker, Kant) "fill the soul with awe and wonder: the starry heaven above and the moral law within." How many of us have felt this amazement without expressing it! We look up to the sky on a night when stars shine brightly, There is not the smallest orb which we behold that

is not a world, a blazing sun. We think of what has been ascertained respecting the distances of these worlds from our own, and from each other. We know that our dwelling-place is so small and so remote, relatively to these, as to be absolutely invisible to them. Yet here is this little dot in the limitless universe, tenanted with myriads of beings possessing minds and hearts, capable of hopes and fears, of joys and sorrows, each struggling for happiness, and clinging to precious life, and groping for a trust that it will not perish with the perishing things around it. Here am I, with anxieties, and ambitions, and griefs, and delights, and thoughts that can soar as far as these stars, and yet with petty needs and insignificant troubles, utterly contemptible if measured by the vastness of the material universe, yet to *me*, the individual, transcendently, inexpressibly momentous! Is there any provision for my tiny interests in the working of this stupendous whole? or am I beneath notice? Am I like the animalcule in the water drop, which shares with me this mysterious thing called life, which to-day is and to-morrow perishes, with millions of its fellows, in the drying up of the little pool which is *its* world. It was thoughts such as these which impelled David to exclaim, "When I consider Thy

heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained: what is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the Son of Man, that Thou visitest him?"

But, besides the starry heavens, the other subject of contemplation which filled the philosopher with amazement was "the moral nature of man." Approach man from a material point of view, and he is indeed utterly insignificant; but view him from a spiritual point of view, and how truly wonderful is he! Let us adopt what theories we may as to his origin, the *fact* remains that between him and every other creature in the world a great gulf is fixed. That strange faculty within him which witnesses to a law above himself, which speaks to him of the right even when he is yielding to the wrong, which enables him to hold communion with infinite perfection, which gives meaning to such words as "trust," "duty," "obedience," "religion;" that faculty which perpetuates in him the image of his Maker; whence did it come? Is it true that this frail and insignificant being, subject to a hundred thousand casualties, who "cometh up and is cut down like a flower," has yet within him faculties which connect him with Deity, which supply him with a grand ideal, which fill him with a

longing to be perfect as God is perfect, which help him to rise victorious over sorrow and suffering and death.

"Mere delusion!" the champion of an ignoble materialism rejoins. "The result of organization! He is nothing after all but a more finely constituted animal. He happens to have a larger brain, and more delicate in structure." And pray, how does this relieve me of my difficulty? Why, it heightens the mystery a hundredfold! It was strange on any theory that the creature man should possess these magnificent faculties, these boundless aspirations, that he should be almost as a God, knowing good and evil; but to suppose in addition that he was furnished with capacities which are never to be satisfied, that he aspires to know a Deity whom he never *can* know, to crave a righteousness which is merely the product of his own brain; to conclude, in short, that his whole being is constituted upon a lie; why, this, for a thinking mind, instead of clearing away the mystery deepens it to the uttermost. Plato, Shakspeare, and Beethoven, David, Isaiah, and Paul, these men are mysteries, however we account for their transcendent gifts; but to contend that their thoughts and feelings did not point to realities

beyond this world of sense, that their highest and noblest conceptions were but an eccentricity and a dream, that *they* perished when the material part of their being yielded to corruption, is as incredible as it is shocking.

"Yes," said Pascal, "man is a worm, but then he is a worm that thinks." This is exactly the mystery which filled a mind so powerful as that of Kant. It filled his mind just because it was powerful, for we may be very certain that to see no mystery in man and his spiritual nature is a sure mark of a shallow and second-rate mind. Now, brethren, precisely the thoughts we have been dwelling upon, the majesty of the material world and the wondrousness of the moral nature of man, are pointed to in the psalm before us. The first part enlarges upon the glories of the firmament; the second very beautifully sets forth the worth of that moral law of God which involves and implies a moral nature in man. The latter may have been added at a later period, but it is in admirable harmony with the first part of the psalm.

Observe, my brethren, what the idea is which connects the two. What is the thought which the contemplation of the heavenly bodies presents to us most prominently? Is it not order, or, to use a word

which is found in every page of our scientific books, "law?" No one observing, as David did, how "seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night," came and went, and were due mainly to the fixed course of the orbs of the sky, could fail to see *law* inscribed upon the face of the heavens. If David felt thus, who looked upon the sun, moon, and stars as no more than centres and points of light fixed in the dome of the firmament to give light to the earth, we may well feel it, who live in an age in which astronomy has attained an exactness truly marvellous. "Law" rules supreme in the material world, though still we must ever connect law with a lawgiver.

But how about the spiritual world? Are there laws for mind as well as for body? Is there not an order in moral things which cannot be violated with impunity? Yea, brethren; the Kingdom of Heaven is a reign of law too. The rule of the universe is not physical order, spiritual disorder, but one order alike for the material and the moral. It is one Lawgiver who keeps the stars in their courses and impresses on the moral nature of man methods of acting to which we must conform or perish. "The law of the Lord is perfect," David tells us; a perfect law for soul as

well as for body. The law of the material world we reach through observation and generalisation; the law of the soul through God's revelations of Himself to man's spiritual nature; but both are alike of God, not two laws but *one*, which is as perfect in the world of mind as in the world of matter.

It is indeed a great misfortune that there should be at the present moment a feeling of distrust between those who are engaged in the study of physical laws, and those who are zealous for God's revelation in Christ, between the scientific men and the religionists. It is too true that certain of those who give themselves to the investigation of the laws of material nature somewhat superciliously overlook the great spiritual laws of man's being, which will assert themselves whether we choose to overlook them or not.[1] It is equally true that many religious people are manifestly alarmed at the progress of science, and betray an unholy distrust of investigation, and suggest the impression that they are afraid

[1] "Duty! wondrous thought, that workest neither by fond insinuation, flattery, nor by any threat; but merely by holding up thy naked law in the soul, and so extorting for thyself always reverence, if not always obedience; before whom all appetites are dumb, however secretly they rebel; whence thy original?"—Kant, quoted by Darwin, *Descent of Man*, part i. chap. 3.

that some of their cherished beliefs will be exploded by the progress of speculation. But sure I am that this narrowness and distrust will not last for ever, that there is a day coming when science and revelation will no longer be confronted as enemies, but will stand forth as joint witnesses to *His* glory, from whom they both proceed; when His children will, under the power at once of enlightened faith and of sanctified reason, swell the song of thanksgiving for His goodness and greatness alike in nature and in grace: "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints."

But now, brethren, can you glance at this simple and beautiful delineation of God's law, without perceiving how pure, and elevating, and ennobling was the writer's conception of true religion? As administered by man, law is too often stern and awe-inspiring, even when it is not unjust. The law of God itself is often so distorted by human perverseness as to seem oppressive and austere. And even when not distorted, when unfolded in its majesty and goodness, it is distasteful to unrenewed men, so that they thrust it away from them, even as they entreated the Saviour Himself to let them alone and to depart out of their coasts. But they who accept that law in

singleness of heart, and once and for ever yield it their soul's allegiance, to them it is no irksome constraint, but enfranchisement, and life, and strength. It rejoices the heart, let its calumniators say what they please of the harshness and gloom of religion. It is no distasteful remedy, beneficial but bitter; for it is "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." It is no fretting constraint, for, in keeping of it "there is great reward."

Whenever, my brethren, you shrink from God's service as a yoke hard to be borne, you may be quite sure that you are misled by either of two fatal errors. You are accepting your conceptions of religion second-hand, from those whose interest it is, being themselves unrighteous, to caricature it. The service of God, being the best thing in this sinful world, is (probably for that reason) the most misrepresented. And if you *will* accept other men's impressions of God's law, instead of verifying for yourself what God affirms; if you will not "taste and see" that the Lord is gracious; you will be led terribly and fatally astray. He who knows God's law only by report does not know it at all. One day's experience of well-doing, one brave God-inspired effort to please your Saviour, will do more

to unfold to you truthful views of His will and purposes than all the random impressions of a lifetime without effort and without earnestness.

Or you may do worse than accept the misrepresentations of the evilminded. You may yourself misrepresent God's law. The slothful servant in the parable first chose to regard his master as a hard man, and then made his own misrepresentation the pretext for withholding his due. There is some pleasant sin you will not part with, and it is hard, when the strong temptation comes upon you, to believe it to be really best that you should resist it. And then you think God austere. The fault, you allow yourself to whisper to conscience, is not in your refusing due obedience, but in God's asking too much. You not only do the evil thing, but you justify yourself in harsh and rebellious thoughts of Him whose one infinite desire is the good and the happiness of His children. Learn to confide in His will as best. Let your earnest prayer be on this wise :—

> "Renew my will from day to day,
> Blend it with Thine, and take away
> All that now makes it hard to say,
> Thy will be done."

"When you can in simplicity utter words like these, you have found the one true way. The good work has begun, and He who has begun it "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

XXIII.

STRENGTH.

1 CORINTHIANS xvi. 13.

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

IT seems quite certain that in proportion as society becomes more highly organised, the gentler, more amiable, and more social virtues are increasingly cultivated, while the sterner and more heroic are less valued and developed. Thus courage in enduring pain is probably the most characteristic virtue, as far as it is a virtue, of savage life. That is, I suppose, because in disturbed and warlike communities, much depends upon courage and endurance. In more civilised societies, on the contrary, there are fewer opportunities for the exercise of these qualities, and they gradually cease to be so highly appreciated. Again, in a high state of civilisation, there are so many devices to promote comfort and to diminish pain, that men suffer less, and are therefore less capable

of bearing suffering heroically. Then it is found that amiability and gentleness, and the disposition to give and take, are socially such useful qualities that they come to be very highly valued, while the more stalwart and inflexible type of character is less popular, and therefore less frequently developed. In civilised communities, too, the individual is precluded from revenge, and punishment is transferred to a passionless tribunal, appointed by society; but this, though a most desirable result, has of course a natural tendency to repress the sterner and more vigorous traits of character.

In fact it must be admitted that often as refinement increases force of character diminishes. To combine the maximum of refinement with the maximum of strongly-marked individuality, is a momentous problem, and certainly it is one that has not yet been solved. We are not saying that these blessings of a high civilisation are not real blessings, only that they carry with them a tendency to impair force of character. There is no use whatever in lamentations over this decline in the sterner virtues. Less civilised times have their characteristic merits, and more civilised times theirs. If we wished to bring back the rougher and harder times of our forefathers we

could not do so. But we are not the less justified in striving with might and main to preserve that force and steadfastness of character, which, it must be confessed, we are in imminent danger of losing.

And here undeniably Christianity will exert a quite incalculable influence. For beyond doubt its demand is ever that which my text reiterates, "quit you like men; *be strong*." I am now speaking of the Christianity of our Lord and His apostles, the Christianity which has done great things in the world. The insipid, negative, sentimental type of saintliness, so much in favour in certain quarters, is most positively not the high Christian type. Even our conception of the Saviour's character has not escaped the tendency to invest all things religious with an air of maudlin feebleness. We speak, and speak truly, of the meek and gentle Saviour, and doubtless His patience and long-suffering were such new things in the world, that it was natural to dwell on them until men forgot that He was not merely patient and long-suffering, but, when the need arose, stern with the sternness of offended righteousness, scathing and terrible in His denunciation of selfishness, godlessness, and hypocrisy.

I suppose that it will not be disputed that Paul, who here commands us to be "strong," was himself

a marvellous exemplification of force of character. But then St. Paul has never been a favourite with sentimental mediævalists. His noble character has defied all attempts to eliminate its manliness, its intellectual vigour, its undaunted and unsurpassed fearlessness.

It would seem that the fatal impression that Christianity implies feebleness must have been much deepened after what is called the establishment of Christianity under Constantine, when the profession of the faith became fashionable. Then came the repression of the intellect by spiritual despotism, and as you cannot, in the long run, do violence to one part of man's nature without debasing the rest, men, in proportion as they became intellectually imbecile, became also morally and spiritually nerveless and insipid.

With this mournful decline, the worship of the Virgin was doubtless connected. When men concentrated their devotional feelings upon a woman instead of God, they inevitably became, I shall not say feminine (for there is no proper connection between what is feminine and what is feeble), but effeminate. In the Madonna of somewhat later times, a very poor, inane type of womanhood was

presented for imitation. The female character came to be regarded as little more than the negation of what was high, courageous, and self-reliant in man, with results which seem to linger to the present time, and which must be regarded as deplorable. And of course the systematic purpose to exclude the element of strength from womanhood, to regard feebleness, indefiniteness, and helplessness as characteristic of the sex, reacted most fatally upon men; for it is not likely that men will be intellectually and morally strong, if women are intellectually and morally weak.

And we see the issue of the whole matter in the pertinacity with which men continue to associate feebleness of understanding and of will with the being religious. Is it not the fact that when they hear of a man's, and especially of a *young* man's, being religious, they at once think of what is prim, sanctimonious, weak, and sentimental? Certainly the word "religious" does not recall the idea of moral and intellectual "strength." Somehow it does not suggest the idea which my text presents. Perhaps indeed, if I were to attempt it, I might make a tolerable defence for these persons. For, after all, the grand criterion is a Christian life. It is better to

lead a Christian life, however inconsistently, however weakly, than to live a mere animal life, however vigorously. And I know that the fear of God, in its best sense, does enable not a few to keep themselves pure, who but for religion would be the slaves of the evil influences around them. I may admit and may regret their remaining weaknesses; but when I ask myself what they would have been but for religion, I dare not deny that the faith which may have been but as a grain of mustard-seed has yet been a real power in their lives. Better be a strong Christian than a weak one, but better be a weak Christian than live without honest effort and without God.

But, without insisting on this, I am willing to admit at once, that it is not so very unreasonable to connect much of the religion of the day with the idea of feebleness, and not of strength. This was felt by some excellent and able men now a quarter of a century since, and what was derisively called "muscular Christianity," was energetically taught by them; in particular, with great literary brilliancy and splendour of imagination, by that gifted clergyman who has lately passed away from amongst us. It seemed, indeed, as if even from the

outset there was a certain taint of affectation about it which led to more or less of failure. The condemnation of cant not unfrequently became itself a cant. It seemed to many to make religion consist, not so much in faith and hope and charity, as in excessive devotion to athletic sports. But I am quite sure that its distinctive principle was a vitally important one; that the body belongs to God as well as the soul; that our bodies are "the temple of the Holy Ghost"; that physical and mental feebleness are intimately connected; that the "strength" upon which Christianity insists is the uplifting of the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

But when you charge this feebleness of character upon Christianity, I entreat you to ask yourself whether you mean Christianity as exemplified in the Saviour himself, in the apostle Paul, in the first preachers of the Gospel; the Christianity which conquered the civilized world; the Christianity which produced martyrs and missionaries; or the Christianity of the modern religious world? Do you find this spiritual feebleness within the pages of the New Testament? It will probably be rejoined that I have virtually admitted that the tendency

of a high civilization is unfavourable to the formation of a "strong" character; at least, in the sense of a character strongly individual.

And this may frankly be confessed, but yet with important limitations. It may, *e.g.*, be freely admitted that so much of the "strength" of English character goes off in the direction of a man's particular profession or business, and that what Mr. Darwin would call "the struggle for existence" becomes so intense, that no vigour is left when he passes to his home from the office or the counting-house. Whether this is a satisfactory state of things, or whether, supposing it unsatisfactory, it is possible to alter it, are far too grave questions to be discussed at the end of a sermon. I cannot, however, think the plea is quite a sufficient one; for I find men rising up early and late taking rest, and eating the bread of carefulness, not to secure a moderate provision for themselves or their children, but to minister to the extravagance of their wives or sons or daughters, to procure themselves the reputation of being very rich men, or, at best, from that unreasoning and uncalculating avidity for work, which is at once the weakness and strength of the English character.

Remember that if a high civilization gives less

scope for some virtues, it ought to develop others. Remember that Christianity ought to be able to adjust itself to every condition of social life. It is not that it is to have less vitality in the present day, but that its vitality will manifest itself in a different way. I cannot altogether allow the plea just mentioned, for more reasons than one. It is obvious, *e.g.*, that there is much more of luxurious outlay than can be in any way necessary to the retaining one's position in society. We think more of, and spend more on, our comforts, than we ever did before. Young people, whose fulness of health should render them less dependent on those comforts, spend, I fear, much more than they have ever done before in merely personal indulgences, and waste a sad amount of money in sheer extravagances. The style of living at our universities, even on the part of those whose station by no means requires large expenditure, is a folly and a disgrace and a just cause of alarm. Is there not, in the mere effort to live plainer lives, abundant scope for that force of character of which we are here speaking?

Again, it is quite certain that in the conduct of business there is very much going on which is at variance, I shall not say with high Christian prin-

ciple, but with honour and truth and self-respect. Is it such a simple thing to conduct business as high-minded men should conduct it, that there is no real scope for the application of Christian principles? I believe nothing of the kind. Transactions come to light every day involving the most flagrant disregard, not only of Christian precepts, but of the most elementary moralities of life. And I suppose that those who have a share in those transactions are men who are duly forthcoming in church on Sundays, and once a week hear the ten commandments read and ask God to incline their hearts to keep His law. No, no. There is ample scope for force of character in the lives of every one of us. We have not reached a point at which "strength" may cease to be a characteristic of our Christianity. There never was more need for it. The need is in proportion to the great temptation we are under to softness and feebleness.

But of this we may be perfectly sure, that Christianity never did, and never will, win its triumphs by presenting to the world its merely negative side. It is nothing if not aggressive. All truth is aggressive, and that which is emphatically "the truth" must confront and do battle with unreality and pretence.

Christianity cannot be merely defensive. If it is satisfied with defending, it will not do even that. Whenever it is compelled to take an apologetic attitude, its defeat is assured. Those who are attacking it at the present moment know this perfectly well. It is not necessary that they should utterly demolish it. If they can prevent its gaining ground, it must lose ground. Mildness will not convert the world. Were we ourselves ever powerfully impressed by views of religion in which the element of "strength" was deficient? What, *e.g.*, is it in Christianity that appeals to the young? Not sickly sentiment and sermonising, but stories of sacred heroism, the achievements of Old Testament worthies, the records of martyrdom, the triumphs of missionary enterprise, the conflicts of Christian the pilgrim with Apollyon and Giant Despair; and, crowning all these, the sacrifice and death of the Captain of our Salvation.

Christianity is nothing, if not an enthusiasm; nothing in its power to elevate our individual characters; nothing in imparting that influence over others which is the secret of its successes; nothing in its efficacy to win back a world spell-bound by sin. The Divine Master marked the true and unalter-

able character of the Gospel when He declared that "the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." And the Master's declaration finds its best commentary in the words of His greatest disciple:—"As unknown and yet well-known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

XXIV.

NO PLACE OF REPENTANCE.

HEBREWS xii. 17.

"For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

ALTHOUGH the record in the book of Genesis respecting the two sons of Isaac is undoubtedly favourable on the whole to the younger, yet it may be very truly affirmed that there is no disposition to suppress what was censurable in his conduct, or to exaggerate the faults of his brother. The narrative has indeed but little colouring, is scarcely more than a matter of fact statement of what occurred; but undoubtedly whatever was cunning and worldly wise in the character of Jacob is freely exhibited, while Esau's character is not hardly dealt with, and in the account of his reconciliation with his brother is presented even in an amiable and generous

light. There was, it must be confessed, nothing heroic in Jacob's nature, and there seems not the least tendency to present him to us as an hero, even as there is no desire to bring into strong relief the wrongdoings of Esau.

I shall, however, attempt no general estimate of the character and conduct of the two brothers, but limit myself to the one point suggested by the writer to the Hebrews, viz., the inability of Esau to find a place of repentance. In what sense was this true? How does it affect the question of the efficacy of repentance; and more particularly, does it bear upon that painful question of the efficacy of a so-called death-bed repentance? It is curious that a considerable number of respectable commentators should interpret the "repentance" here spoken of, not as Esau's own repentance, but as his father's. I cannot see what pretext there can be for such a view of the passage. It surely would be a most obscure and misleading mode of expression if the writer had meant, "he (*i.e.* Esau) found that his *father* had no room for, no opportunity of, change of purpose."

The transaction to which the context refers is, you will perceive, not the attempt to secure the blessing, but the parting with the birthright. The point in fact

of the whole history is that the birthright properly carried the blessing with it. The unfavourable feature in Esau's conduct was, that, having knowingly parted with certain advantages, he sought to escape the consequences of his own act, and by deception to recover those advantages. Grant that Jacob's character was insincere and his conduct artful, it is no less certain that Esau was guilty of a dishonourable attempt to evade the consequences of his own act. The context here, I repeat, has reference not to the bestowal of the blessing, but to the parting with the birthright. *That* was the act which left no opportunity for repentance, and the repentance must consequently be Esau's own repentance, which was rendered impossible by his own act.

The moral lesson is, in truth, to a great extent missed, unless we connect his subsequent remorse and tears with his own fatal infatuation, and not with the conduct of some one else. Certainly if Esau was cheated out of a blessing which should fairly have been his, he may justly claim our pity; but if he was slyly attempting to recover what he had parted with for a consideration, we must judge him very differently. The blessing was *in* the birthright. There was no room for change of

purpose, once Esau relinquished the latter. There is, then, on the very surface of the story this lesson, so plain yet so momentous, that we may do acts which leave us no "place of repentance," that it is possible at the outset of life to place ourselves under conditions which no future sorrow, no agonising cry, no bitter tears, can ever alter. The deed was done; it has gone away into the past; no future action can ever make our life the same as though it had not been committed.

We assume, then, confining ourselves for the present to the effects of *sin* in this world, that no repentance *ever* has the effect of inducing God to violate His natural laws. Certain effects follow certain causes, and no regret of ours can interpose between the cause and the effect. I guard myself here by adding that I have no intention to deny either the possibility of miracle, or the lawfulness of prayer for the averting of temporal ills. I certainly do believe that the effect of prayer is never to effect a violation of any natural law. As to miracle, while I hold it mere presumption to affirm that God cannot dispense with his natural laws, I hold also that, as a matter of fact, He

never does, and that any expectation that He will is purely illusory.

Some persons seem to think that there is something peculiarly religious in the conception of God as continually interfering with His own laws, and that there is something revolting to piety in the idea of fixed law. I confess my impression is precisely the reverse. The thought of God's constantly interposing to suspend His laws seems to me unworthy, freakish, and irrational. In the order of nature I perceive a God of order. But however this may be, certain it is that the most fearful consequences have followed from the hope, fostered by false religions for their own sinister objects, that God may be induced, in consequence of certain acts of ours, to prevent effects from following their causes. If we could only fix in men's minds the conception that God's laws are inexorable; that the connection between filth, dissoluteness, intemperance, on the one hand, and disease, suffering, and death on the other, are invariable, that this connection God *never* interrupts, there would then be an end of that almost incredible inability to perceive the value of sanitary reforms which makes those reforms so difficult.

Men have been so schooled into the notion that God does not surely execute His own laws that everyone trusts that, in his case at all events, there is a chance of evading them.

The truth is, that man is a born gambler. Until his nature is changed there is something of pastime for him in the attempt to snatch the unlawful indulgence and escape the penalty. And to this inveterate gambling propensity the idea of God as easily dispensing with His own laws fatally ministers, while the conception of those laws as unvarying cuts it up from the roots. It is as cruel as it is false, this doctrine that prayers and tears will prevent misery from following wrong-doing, anguish and disease from overtaking intemperance and vice. Of course it is not denied that there are agencies more or less within reach which are, under certain conditions, remedial, which can mitigate suffering and postpone death. But these produce their effect through law and by honouring law, *never* by violating it. And there would be no danger of men's unduly trusting to these, if they once seized the conception of the absolutely fixed reign of law, the necessary invariable connection between cause and effect.

In season and out of season we must convince men that their "sin will find them out." As to the temporal consequences of evil, we must insist that there is *no* place of repentance, though it be sought carefully with tears. It is kind to do so, not unfeeling nor harsh. We must tell him who is yielding to the first allurements of the wine-cup that in his case the same law will take effect which turns the hard drinker to a shattered and delirious wretch, dropping into a premature grave. We must tell the frivolous lover of pleasure who turns night into day, and keeps up an everlasting round of vain amusement, that God will no more dispense in his case than in that of others with the law that crowded rooms and late feasting and insufficiency of sleep mean an impaired constitution, and the lot of the invalid. We must tell him who, making haste to be rich, overtaxes the faculties which God has bestowed upon him, that those faculties are equal to a certain amount of work, but that the very instant that amount is exceeded, nature is absolutely inexorable; the breakdown comes by as elementary laws as that fire burns, or water turns to ice. We must tell those who give way to licentious courses, that if they rely on the strength

of their constitutions to carry them through a career of degrading self-indulgence unscathed they will be terribly undeceived.

Results may vary as to degree, and doubtless bodily strength may make a great difference, but never, *never*, is the connection between sin and its penalty interrupted. Strength wickedly squandered never can be recovered. In all these cases, it is best to say at once that there is "no place of repentance, though it be sought carefully with tears." Until we admit this, we may not proceed to ask what repentance *can* effect, and what is its true place in the probationary method under which we live?

But here it is needful to observe that the words before us do not touch one way or the other the grave question of the precise worth of what is called "a deathbed repentance." It was of course in reference to the one matter of the birthright, not at all as to his spiritual condition generally, that Esau found no place of repentance. From the very nature of the case, as soon as he parted with the birthright, his probation, so far as it was concerned, was absolutely at an end. But, in regard to our future hopes, it cannot be strictly affirmed that any man's probation is completely

closed. We cannot say this of any living creature. We do not know that any mortal man has lost *his* birthright in the same final and irrevocable way as Esau. The cases therefore are not analogous. The possibility of reinstatement had no existence as regarded the birthright. One act had settled that for ever.

But, thank God, the possibility of reinstatement is, for us, through our merciful Saviour, and no less merciful Father, a most blessed reality. We cannot say of the worst man who ever lived, that the outgoing of God's fatherly grace and pity is in regard to him absolutely impossible. Nay, he cannot say it of himself. Therefore our position in strictness is not parallel to that of Esau. There *is* a place of repentance. There *is* a seeking with tears, the effort of the broken and contrite heart, which God will not despise. As to deathbed repentance, indeed, the matter is perhaps not so difficult as it appears. We speak now, of course, of real repentance, not of mere remorse; of sorrow for sin, and not merely for the consequences of sin; of change of mind and feeling (which is the very sense of the word rendered "repentance"), not change of mere outward behaviour.

If, then, the question be asked, "Is deathbed repentance a possible thing?" of course there can be but one reply. We cannot say that repentance is impossible at *any* moment of a sinner's life, and therefore we cannot pronounce it impossible at his last moment. But if the far more practical question be asked, "What is the *likelihood* that repentance, real repentance, will take place at that moment; what proportion do the chances of its not being then effected bear to the chances of its being so?" it is right, it is kind to give to that question a decisive, however stern, reply. It is scarcely too much to say that it is just the one moment of existence when such a mighty change is least likely to be accomplished, and that the chances of its being accomplished bear to the chances of its not being accomplished quite an infinitesimal proportion; a consideration, I may mention in passing, which suggests an argument against capital punishment, which, on Christian grounds, it seems difficult indeed to answer.

I do not dwell here on the physical inability of the dying to conduct any mental process whatever. If the opinions of medical men were to determine the question, I apprehend there would be litt'e

doubt about it. But is it not plain that the very circumstance of knowing that recovery is impossible constitutes a most formidable difficulty in the way of that repentance, which ought to be essentially a voluntary process. How can it be voluntary *if* it must be effected in presence of the fear of death and of judgment? Through all mental exercises which then take place for the first time, there must run the fatal taint of their being conducted under coercion, and therefore being destitute of any spiritual value, wrung from the sinner by terror, not the spontaneous experience of a truly penitent heart. Surely the very utmost length we are justified in going is to say that deathbed conversion is *just not impossible*. True kindness, real ministerial faithfulness, should forbid our going a hair's breadth further.

But we ought not to pass from this dread subject as men without hope. To every person with whom remains the power of choice, who in the exercise of that choice can turn to the Heavenly Father who loves him and would win him back to Himself, we proclaim a "place of repentance." If your forgetting your birthright was a reason for its passing from you, you would have lost it long

ago. If the covenant of your salvation stood in your faithfulness, and not in God's, it would have been long since broken. Certain temporal results of your sin remain. These you have laid upon yourself, and your repentance will evidence itself in your bearing them patiently and penitently. But not yet is the birthright forfeited. You are in the land of the living. God's promises yet hold good. He is as patient, as tender, as ready to save as ever. The Cross of Christ has not lost its power. The pledge of His Spirit standeth sure. *Now* the "place of repentance" remains. This I can say, say with more than human authority. But no more am I authorised to say. My message relates to the present. As to the future, I say nothing, because I know nothing.[1]

[1] It will be perceived that the leading idea of this sermon was suggested by the poem in the *Christian Year* for the Second Sunday in Lent, and the note appended to it.

XXV.

THE UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT.

ST. JOHN ix. 25.

"Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

IN this matter of fact, yet perfectly reasonable, way did the blind man, who had been cured, deal with the objections of the gainsayers. They had their notions as to the impossibility of Jesus' having done such a work. It was not to be supposed that a man who was a sinner, who had broken the Sabbath, of whose origin they knew nothing, could have restored him his sight. They had certain reasons to give beforehand why it could not be so. He simply set his foot upon the fact. "You may think it improbable or even demonstrably impossible that such a thing can be; I merely say that it *is*. Explain it as you will, *I see*. You cannot argue that fact away. You may be right or wrong as to who this man is, or what we are

to think of him, but I cannot be mistaken in supposing I have received my sight. If you tell me that the glorious vision of men, and buildings, and trees, and the blue sky is no more than a vision, that I am as blind as ever, I can understand you, however unreasonable your opinion may be; but do not come to me with your prejudgments, when my senses testify their absurdity. Do not try to prove to me that Jesus could not possibly have given me the gift of sight, when, as a matter of fact, He *has* given it."

Let me indicate to you the use which I propose to make of this cogent reply of the man who had been blind. He was content, you observe, to start upon his inquiries as to the claims of our Lord with a *fact.* The starting-point of his thoughts about Christ, was this, "I *was* blind, but now I see." I am strongly persuaded, my brethren, that we lose much by not sufficiently regarding Christianity as a *fact* in the world's history. I will frankly confess that whereas many of the evidences of Christianity formally set out in treatises, fail to bring full conviction to my mind, yet when I remember how it came into the world, what it did for the world, and how it yet survives as a stubborn fact of the world's present

condition, I *cannot* believe it to be of the earth, earthy. Even if I decline to set out with any theory of its origin, if I simply regard it as a phenomenon of history, and then ask myself "Can the phenomenon be accounted for on any other supposition than that Christianity is divine?" I am driven to reply *no*. Every other explanation of the facts is shallow and insufficient, or else men misrepresent the facts and either do not know what the gospel has been doing for the world, or else wilfully warp or disguise it.

And the argument from Christianity regarded as a fact, from what it actually *does*, is one that has brought conviction to vast numbers, who are not skilled in theology or logic. In early times, its champions put this argument with great effect. They said, "You may call in question the credibility of the gospel story, but you cannot deny the fact that immense multitudes of persons, through belief in Christ, have experienced a moral and spiritual change of the most amazing kind; that with them "old things have passed away, and all things have become new;" that from the midst of heathen darkness and degradation a great company of men has been gathered together, pure, self-denying, exemplary in all relations of life, worthy members of Society;

that these men have declared that the aching void which *sin*, or pleasure, or intellect, or art, could never fill, *has* been filled by Christ; that they have tasted a peace, if not a joy, of which they had not so much as dreamt before, and which, despised as they were, they would not relinquish for worlds, for which they were willing to cast aside all that men hold dear, to sustain tortures unspeakable, to face a dreadful and an ignominious death.

You observe, brethren, that all this is merely matter of fact. If it can be shown, and indeed the position is scarcely called in question by any, that all this Christianity has done for those who accepted it; done it not in some remote corner, and for some handful of people, but on the open stage of the great civilized world; I say it is impossible to believe that the mighty influence which could produce such results is sheer delusion, blind superstition. It is unphilosophical, it is irrational, to overlook a power more than human, in the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven. Were Christianity a cunningly devised fable, delusion would be more powerful than reality, lies than truth.

Some, doubtless, who hear me are acquainted with that celebrated chapter in Gibbon's Decline and Fall

of the Roman Empire, in which he attempts to explain the spread of Christianity by merely earthly causes. What may be said about that chapter is this. No intelligent Christian will deny that the causes he specifies did exist, and did, as far as they went, tend to its extension. But still we affirm that they would have been quite insufficient, apart from a higher influence, to produce such a stupendous spiritual revolution. Spiritual revolutions never were produced by such causes. And there is no want of charity in affirming that Gibbon never fully estimated the moral grandeur of Christianity as a fact in the world's history. No rational man will depreciate his genius, and every Christian ought to confess that he had encountered much which placed him in an attitude of hostility to religion; but he was a cold man and lived in a cold age, and had little sympathy with the uncalculating heroism and childlike purity of the first believers. Dean Milman remarks how Gibbon always tries (an ignoble task!) to undervalue the endurance and self-sacrifice of the first Christians, and to make light of the martyrdoms by which thousands of the best of mankind sealed their faith in a crucified and ever-living Saviour.

At all events the point is, that if the facts be as we

have stated them, the story of the Gospel carries within itself the evidence that it is from God. Can you not understand how this line of thought came home to the primitive Christians? In how many an instance did the licentious become pure, the intemperate sober, the passionate gentle, the riotous orderly! And when he upon whom this great transformation had passed, was met by the scepticism of the world, and assured that he was staking his all upon a delusion, it was a natural, yes, and a reasonable thing to rejoin, "My delusion, if it be so, is better than your truth, for what makes men good must be itself good. But I know by joyful experience that it is no delusion. It has made a man of me. It has given me something to live for, something to die for. You may have your explanations, and whether they be plausible or not, I know not, but 'one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.'" And was the simple believer, who had found in Christ all that he needed, to turn back to his degradation and atheism, to fling into the depths of the sea that pearl of great price, to buy which he had, often in the most literal way, sold all that he had? This could not be what God intended. This were to lose both worlds. He knew by the most

convincing of all evidence that the message of God's love to His children was truth and no lie. He felt in himself that He who had given him sight must be the Son of God.

Now, my brethren, let us go on to observe that this power of Christianity to regenerate men is a fact, that from that day to this it has continued to be a fact. But you perceive the great difficulty under which we labour in pressing it. As you read history, and above all ecclesiastical history, you are shocked by the corruption, the tyranny, the cruelty, which have afflicted the world under the professed sanction of Christianity, and you sometimes pause and ask yourself, can this thing, which has produced such miserable results, be indeed of God? I might answer most fairly, that it was not Christianity which produced them, but the denial of Christianity; that it was when men forgot what their Master had taught them, that then, and not till then, they became corrupt and persecuting and cruel.

But what I would now point out to you is this—that while you have before you what is terrible and repulsive, you do not see, and you cannot see, the quiet, gentle, beneficent influence of the Gospel in human hearts. True piety, remember, is for the

most part a hidden thing. It is the seed sown, and springing up gradually; "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." It is the leaven, working secretly among the meal until the whole is leavened. And so Scripture speaks of real religion as a secret. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." The consequence of all this is, that the real influence of Christianity on the world is a thing under the surface, whilst all the abuses and corruptions and crimes of Christianity falsely so called, are glaringly evident. These the unbeliever can bring into view without any trouble, but we cannot so readily make evident to you that deeper working of the Gospel of the grace of God, which, if we could present it in its true extent, would leave no doubt on your minds that it is indeed the finger of God. We cannot disclose to you the hearts it has comforted and enlightened and redeemed, or show you the homes it brightens or consoles, or make apparent to you the strength it supplies in hours of secret temptation, or the purifying and ennobling effect which quietly and imperceptibly it exerts to raise the tone of society, and make men more unselfish, and humane, and

generous, and high-souled. The noise and clatter of controversy, the strife of tongues, the scheming and hardness and laxity of men calling themselves Christians; all the detestable results of profession without practice; these we see, and cannot help seeing, but who, until the great day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, can tell of the blessed work which in quiet corners, amidst the poor and the unnoticed, by thousands of humble firesides, where the world knows not of its presence and power, the faith in Christ is achieving?

And let me observe, in passing, that if this holy yet unseen work be the result of true Christian faith, we cannot fence Christianity within the limitations of any Church, sect, or following whatever. Wherever men have been enabled, through the healing touch of Christ to declare, "Whereas I was blind, now I see," *there* is Christianity. If any man tries to restrict the power of true conversion to any one denomination, he must outrage all fact and experience. No community has a monopoly of saving souls; all have, though not to the same extent, their trophies to show in souls turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. It is a very deadly sin, if we find real

Christian goodness in those with whom we widely differ, to turn away with contempt because they follow us not, to say "I will not believe this to be genuine goodness, because I find it in a Roman Catholic or a Dissenter." Once allow that every man who becomes a better man through love to Christ is a Christian, and you can no longer confine Christianity to any ecclesiastical body, however reputable and orthodox.

But, before I bring these thoughts to a close, I am anxious to remind you in how unfavourable a position for judging of the divine character of Christianity a man is who knows it merely as an outward system, and has never had experience of it as a living power in heart and life. Once any one has, by God's goodness, been conducted to the joyful experience—"one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see," you will find it very hard to convince him that the faith which has done such great things for him is but a fiction and an hallucination. But suppose he has had no such experience. Suppose religion to have been no more than a system outside himself; a thing of chatter, and formal profession, and exterior decorum, and creeds, and church-goings, and officiousness, and

self-glorification; why, he is addressing himself to the evidence of Christianity, while the greatest evidence of all is not brought into view. You cannot tell whether the Gospel is divine unless you have felt its divinity yourself. Only by knowing that you had been blind, and that now you see, can you possibly arrive at the conclusion that He who opened your eyes must be Divine. If you undertake the investigation without a personal consciousness of His power to change and to bless, you are sitting down to form your conclusions without having the most conclusive evidence before your view. It is the lack of this that leaves men at the mercy of every blast of doctrine. Their acceptance of religion is such a purely extraneous thing, so devoid of any organic connection with their own selves, that a puff carries it away. Some little point of criticism, some doubt about the authenticity of a verse or a chapter, some incidental moral difficulty which occurs in their Bible reading, fills them with trepidation, or even precipitates them into total scepticism.

Surely one who had drunk into Christ's Spirit, and felt himself exalted and renewed by love to His Saviour, would rather say—"this and that and the other are difficulties, and I may have to give

up tenets which I had once held; but it does not follow that I must give up my God. Let me be loyal to what I have *proved* to be real and true; let me walk by the light which I see, and in the genial warmth which I feel, which convince me that the sun in the heavens is a real sun and not an illusion; let me be true to those great elementary beliefs which commend themselves to me as divine, and on all other points I can afford to wait. If in anything I be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this to me. If I have to relinquish opinions, I shall never have to give up my Heavenly Father. 'If any man will do [is willing to do] His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.'"

This, my dear brethren, is beginning at the right end in religious inquiry. God within to strengthen; without to preserve; above to protect; beneath to uphold; before to lead; behind to keep us from straying; round about to defend us. "This God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death."

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